

# THE SAINTS

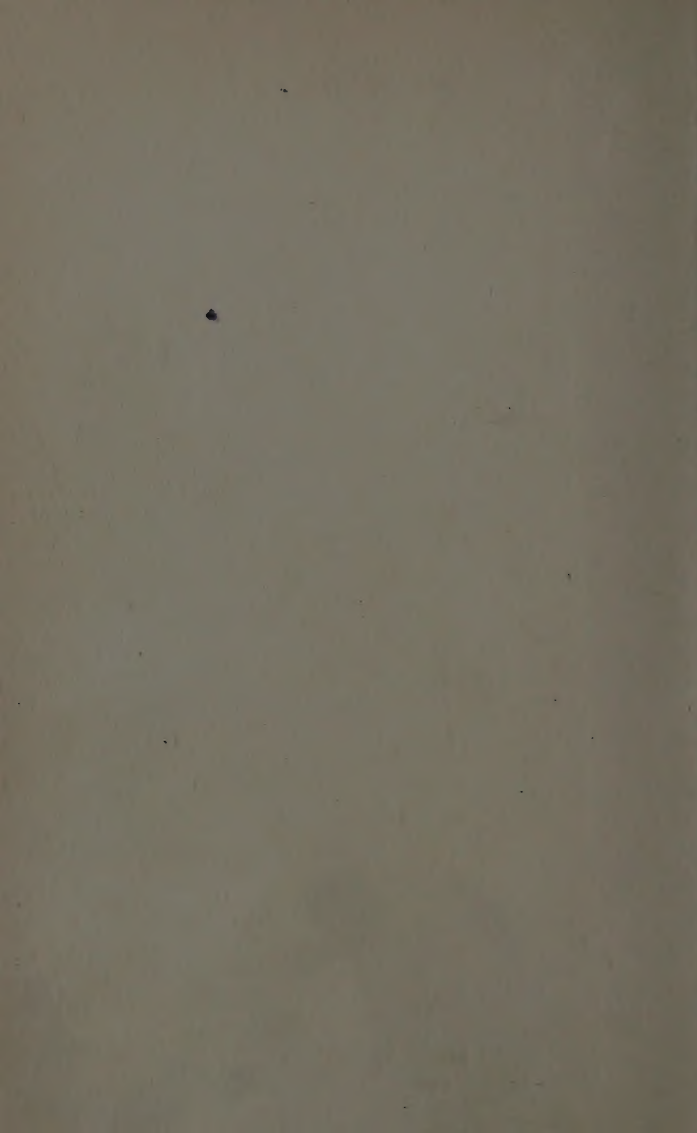








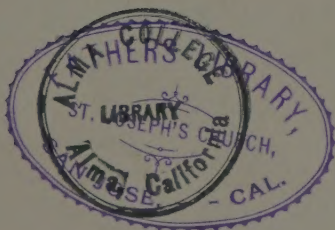




# The Saints.



SAINT AMBROSE



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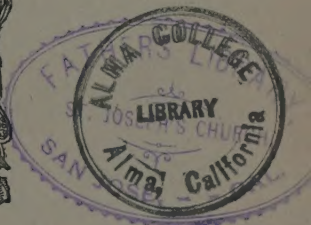
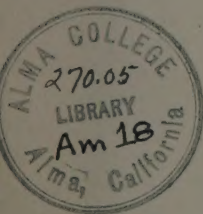
# SAINT AMBROSE

BY

THE DUC DE BROGLIE  
OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

TRANSLATED BY  
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WITH A PREFACE BY  
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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

“A MAN who for the fear of God had never feared to speak the truth to kings or any powers”—such was Ambrose according to his enthusiastic, if not over reliable biographer Paulinus; and, indeed, it is rather as a man of practical genius and strong faith that he stands out prominent among the western Saints, than for any imaginative or theoretical gifts. In saying this we do not forget that he ranks with Jerome, Augustine and Gregory, as one of the “Four Doctors” of the Latin Church; nor are we denying a certain grace and tenderness to much of his mystical writing, both in prose and verse, or to his preaching, a genuine eloquence inseparable from earnestness; but as it is hardly possible to keep Ambrose and Augustine asunder in our thought, the contrast between them, no less than the resemblance, starts up unbidden—the diversity of way, the difference of expression, no less than the sameness of end and the unity of spirit. For there is no clear division of faculties between man and man, but we designate and classify each one according to what is preponderant in him. Augustine, too, was a man of action; but we think of him more readily as a man of thought, and of Ambrose conversely.

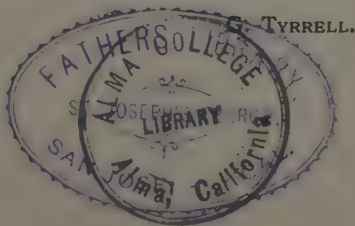
The profession of his choice, if in some way determined by his character, doubtless had much to do with its development; and in giving form and method as well as exercise to his instinctive love of justice, it prepared him for the difficult task of ecclesiastical government at a time when the polity of the Church was as yet imperfectly fashioned and her relation to the secular power but vaguely recognised. Ambrose had not merely the acumen to perceive the necessary consequences involved in the theocratic principle of the supremacy of conscience over Cæsar as laid down and acted upon by Christ and his first followers, but had, moreover, the strength to put them into vigorous execution. Neither in the conflict with Justina and Valentinian about the concession of Catholic churches to the Arians, nor in the rebuking of Theodosius for the inhuman massacre at Thessalonica did he allow any respect for temporal sovereignty to interfere with what was due to God and conscience; and in this he stood out as the ideal and even the type of the Catholic episcopate of all ages, whose characteristic has been in the main (in spite of local and temporary defalcations, whose shame is only deepened by the contrast) a certain independence and "personality" befitting the representatives of an international and world-wide religion, which claims to be the embodiment of the human conscience.

The familiar legend, for it scarcely pretends to be more, of the Emperor holding the Bishop's stirrup, is eloquent as to the popular estimate of the spirit

of Ambrose—a spirit which was at last to prove fatal to all usurped authority based on the superiority of individual to individual, and to establish the divinity of that right alone which is based on the requirements of the common good of mankind. That good spirit is yet “striving with man,” and far from victorious; but among those who have tried best to comprehend its fruitful meaning and to give it more definite voice and expression, Ambrose of Milan will ever stand in the foremost ranks.

In introducing this translation of Le Duc de Broglie's work to English readers, it may be well to forestall a possible objection by stating that though, on the one hand, it is the aim of this series to give a sober historical portrait of each Saint as contrasted with the legendary presentments more popular with certain minds, yet, on the other, historical completeness is not directly aimed at for its own sake, but only such a basis of fact as shall be sufficient to make the character live for us once more in faithful outline. Hence if the author has overlooked some of the most recent bibliography relative to St Ambrose, if he has not taken account of Father Van Ortrov's demolition of the legendary scene between the Saint and Theodosius at the entrance of the Basilica, such an omission, whether intentional or otherwise, does not materially interfere with the modest scope of his undertaking.

LONDON, 1899.





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# SAINT AMBROSE

## CHAPTER I

### AMBROSE ADVISER TO THE EMPEROR GRATIAN

THE decadence of the Roman Empire, followed by its dismemberment and fall, coincided with the diffusion of Christianity over that vast proportion of the world which had been subject for centuries to the yoke of the dominant race. This coincidence of events which, whatever the disparity of their importance, are, at least, unparalleled in their respective spheres, has been a fruitful source of historical controversy. The situation is one admitting of endless conjecture, Divine Providence not having seen fit to reveal whether the maintenance of the Empire converted to Christianity would have been an impossibility, or whether, on the contrary, the Empire converted might have been saved by the regenerating influence of the new religion.

But however this may be, the very fact of the controversy gives a peculiar interest to the Saint, who, standing in the forefront of the moribund society and sharing its vicissitudes while he sought to inter-penetrate it with the Christian spirit, was not the less eminent for his sanctity because he lost

## 2 THE LIFE OF SAINT AMBROSE

none of the natural gifts that made him a great statesman.

Ambrose<sup>1</sup> was born in the earlier half of the fourth century, a period in which the Church, recently freed by the edicts of Constantine, still enjoyed, though often at heavy cost, the benefits of liberty and Imperial favour. He was born at Trêves, his father, another Ambrose, having been sent there by Constantine as Prefect of the Gauls. This Prefecture was the most important government among the four divisions of the Empire, for it comprised not only Gaul properly so-called, which extended to the Rhine, but Spain and England.

The Prefect's reputation as a magistrate stood high, and he belonged to an old and illustrious family, which, converted in the age of persecution, faithfully kept its Christian traditions, and counted the martyrdom of a virgin in the Diocletian persecution among its titles to honour. The mother of our Saint (whose name by an unfortunate omission has not been handed down) bore her husband three children. Marcellina, the eldest, from her earliest childhood animated by the ardour of faith, left her father's house, while still very young, and went to Rome, where, at the feet of Pope Liberius, she consecrated herself to God by a vow of virginity; the rest of her life she spent apart from her family in austere solitude. Her brothers, Satyrus and Ambrose, stayed under the parental roof and were bound to each other by the closest and most

<sup>1</sup> Some writers give A.D. 333 as the date of his birth, others A.D. 340.

touching friendship. Resembling one another in character, tastes, and even in countenance, a certain infantine grace early distinguished Ambrose from his older brother, and such was the influence of this charm, that of him, as of Plato, was told the poetic fable that, while he lay in his cradle, bees swarmed about his lips to suck honey from them.

But happiness in this world, however pure, cannot last. The Prefect died early, and his widow, who had no further reason for living in Trêves, returned to Rome for the education of her sons in the famous schools.

The society into which, by family connections, the youths were thrown in Rome, by no means shared the purity of faith in which the two boys had been brought up. Although dethroned, polytheism still counted many adherents among the old patrician families. With a natural, and not wholly unworthy sentiment, connecting in the common memory of a glorious past the greatness of their race and individual families, they resented the transformation they were obliged to witness as disloyal to Rome and opposed to the virtue of filial piety.

But it was especially among his teachers and fellow-students that Ambrose must have been brought into contact with this admiration of the past and with a society influenced by it. The very groundwork of all instruction given in the schools was the interpretation of Greek and Latin poetry and eloquence, and it was therefore essentially imbued with polytheism. The partisans of the old worship, ill at ease under the new order in every other social

function, were on their own ground here at least. For one science, the noblest of all, the science of Law, they could claim that ancient Rome had not only laid the foundations but fostered the natural development of consequences. These magnificent precepts which form the basis of our modern civil codes, Bossuet describes as the finest application of natural justice the world has ever seen; and no one can study them without respect for the prætors, and even the magistrates, who built such an edifice on the rough foundation of early common law. Ambrose, destined to follow his father's footsteps in the ranks of the upper magistrature, must have been trained at the Bar in a mixed atmosphere which appears to have had no weakening effect on his firm religious convictions. He saw that the resolute exercise of the reasoning faculties and a love of the beautiful in Art are in no wise incompatible with the precepts of faith, and that he would not only lose nothing by familiarising himself with the great writers of antiquity, but gain much. They would help him to more intimate knowledge of the mental attitude of the adversaries the Church, though triumphant, still must encounter, and give him a command of language at once forcible and original that would arrest the attention of opponents he thus met on their own ground and fought with their own weapons.

The same medley of creeds and motives met him outside the schools in his public career. The higher offices and dignities of the Empire, in Rome especially, were divided at this time between Pagans and

Christians, two distinct but mutually tolerant groups, constantly brought into contact in the transaction of business. These groups were respectively represented by two prominent men; Symmachus, Prefect of the city, a Pagan, deservedly popular for his admirable municipal government, and Probus, a Christian, who, after holding various superior posts, was now chief administrator of the important Italian section of the Empire. Probus traced his lineage from Marcus Aurelius, was a man of great personal merit and large fortune, which he spent lavishly in every sort of good work, and was, in fact, altogether an honour to his creed.

In the homes of both these important personages, Satyrus and Ambrose were frequent, and always welcome guests. But Satyrus was said to have a particular affection for Symmachus, who loved him, Ambrose tells us, as a son. Ambrose, for his part, was supposed to be the favourite of Probus. It is at least certain that when the son of Symmachus, famous afterwards as an orator, was sent to Lycaonia as Quæstor, Satyrus entered on official life as his companion, and that Ambrose began his public career in the Prætorian Prefecture under the auspices of Probus.

But the Emperor Valentinian soon moved Ambrose from the Prefecture, and giving him the title of consul, sent him to govern the provinces of Liguria and Emilia, which comprehended the whole of North Italy with Milan for capital.

We are told that when the young man was leaving Rome, Probus gave him much advice suggested by

his own experience, winding up with this injunction : "Go, my son, and act not as a Judge but as a Bishop"—meaning, no doubt, that among peoples distressed by a series of revolts, the authority re-established by disinterestedness and virtue is more secure than that obtained by material force.<sup>1</sup>

Ambrose understood and followed the advice. The provinces intrusted to him were soon sensible of his mild firm government, and all the more by contrast. Valentinian, the Emperor, a rough honest soldier, a martinet in discipline, ruled the neighbourhood of Milan with pitiless, and often precipitate severity wherever the least opposition was shown. "Severity," he was fond of saying, "is the soul of justice and justice is the soul of power."

Ambrose's notion of justice was nobler. It was a virtue, he said, that ought to bring peace to the governed and be the shield of the oppressed. He was accessible to all, listened to everybody's grievances, redressed wrongs, and when he had to inflict chastisement, it was so tempered with mercy that even while he carried out the orders of the Emperor who was only feared, he was himself beloved. He was respected too for the unblemished purity of his life and for his charity and generosity. This popularity is the more remarkable because the city was torn by faction. The still incomplete transition from one religion to another there, as well as elsewhere, was a source of trouble, but dissension in the bosom of the Church itself aggravated the situation at Milan.

The heresy of Arius, although anathematised at

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose was sent to Milan A.D. 372.

its birth by the Council of Nicæa, had nevertheless spread all over the Empire. Of vital moment, since it touched the very essence of Christian truth, it was a variation in doctrine the importance of which the vulgar might easily misapprehend. It was the denial, in fact, of the Divine nature of Christ, and reduced Him to the level of a creature. But because this teaching crudely stated would at once have revolted the Christian conscience as sacrilege, and was besides very difficult to reconcile with the Gospel narrative and the utterances of Jesus Himself, it was set forth in skilfully subtilised terms. After twenty years of discussion, it had taken this form: "Is the Son equal to the Father, or only like Him? Does He share His infinite substance, or is He only the Image of the Divine Model?" Those who disputed the equality allowed the likeness, and this subtle distinction was expressed by opposing Greek terms differing only by a letter (*homoousios*, *homoiousios*). But however ingeniously might be mitigated the form in which the error was expressed, the error with all its consequences was none the less pernicious. For if Christ were not God, worship paid Him was rendered to an intermediary nature, to a demi-god or genius. There were, in fact, two Gods, one a greater, the other a lesser divinity, one above the other, and if two, why not more than two, equal or not equal? The integrity of the Divine Unity was in fact assailed, and if the attack succeeded, every sort of pagan superstition and philosophical theory might be revived. The triumph of Arianism would reduce the Church to a polytheism, tempor-

arily cleansed of the grosser forms of pagan worship, but vitiated in its essence and certain to lapse into the degrading and shameful ceremonies of an idolatry which the Gospel came into the world to purge out of it.

And not only in the Eastern Church, where Arius first taught his heresy and where his influence had been most extensive, men's minds were confused by the formulary in which the new doctor skilfully blended truth with falsehood. Milan, some twenty years earlier, had been the scene of stormy discussion between the defenders of the Council of Nicæa and the party who, not venturing to defy the Council openly, nevertheless did their best to discredit it by unnatural interpretations of its decisions. The discussions were held before the Emperor Constans, whom certain ambitious bishops, corrupted by Court life, had persuaded his authority included the decision of religious questions. He did therefore decide, and in favour of error, having the sagacity to perceive that in the nature of things that party only would be amenable to material force.

This arbitrary pretension had been resisted by Dionysius, Bishop of Milan, who was punished by banishment. Dying in exile, his successor, an Arian and a stranger in the country, the language of which he could hardly speak, was thrust into the vacant See. He had little authority, but nevertheless his existence and everything he did were fruitful sources of dissensions in the city, and even open hostilities were repressed only by the strong hand of Valen-



tinian, who professed a lofty contempt for all quarrels, and though a Christian, made no exception for those involving the gravest theological issues.

<sup>1</sup> The death of Auxentius, therefore, a year after Ambrose arrived, seemed likely to plunge the city into serious religious, and perhaps political troubles. To the bishops of the province in conjunction with their clergy, belonged the election of a successor, and it was doubtful which section of the divided city and Church would prevail. Two important powers had to be considered; on the one hand the faithful, in no mood to have thrust on them a second time an alien pastor of doubtful orthodoxy; on the other, the Emperor, who if not conciliated might, like his predecessor Constans, assert his power in the form of threats. As a matter of prudence, therefore, the bishops sent him a deputation. But Valentinian, severe in resisting the least encroachment on his own prerogatives, seems to have made it almost a point of honour to respect those of the Church, and his only answer to the deputation was to refuse even his advice. "I am unequal to the choice," he said. "It is your business to make it. Choose a bishop worthy of the office. To such a one I will incline myself, and will receive from him the instruction necessary to my salvation."

Thrown on themselves, the bishops met in the upper story of a Basilica, the faithful, impatient to know their decision, crowding into the nave. The excitement became at last so tremendous, the

<sup>1</sup> A.D. 374, Ambrose was consecrated Bishop of Milan.

decision being delayed, that the noise of the tumult reached Ambrose and he was told the rival parties had already had some altercation. It was his duty as magistrate to quell the tumult, and hastening to the Basilica, he called upon the crowd to use self control and wait patiently for the result of the deliberation. His language was remarkable both for grace and firmness and he was heard in hushed silence, in the midst of which rose the thrilling treble of a little child's voice uttering these words three times: "Ambrose, Bishop."

It seemed a message from Heaven, the voice of praise from the mouth of a child, according to the Saviour's words.

The cry was caught up and echoed from side to side: "Ambrose! Ambrose! Bishop!" The homage to the character of the Christian, to the magistrate impartial among factions, was perfectly unpremeditated, but only Ambrose either did not or would not understand. The honour, totally unexpected, carried with it a crushing burden. Loyal to the Church in every act of his life, he had never had any intention of consecrating himself in this manner to her service.<sup>1</sup> "I belonged," he says, "to the world, and now I was to be torn from all its vanities."

He was, moreover, in accordance with a practice at that time too common in Christian families, waiting for the hour of death to receive the Sacrament that remits the sins of a lifetime. He had never

<sup>1</sup> Dederam me sæculo huic . . . abductus sum a vanitatibus hujus sæculi.—"De Pœnitentia," L. ii., ch. vii.

been baptized, was not even a catechumen, and by a rule of the Church it was forbidden to raise a neophyte to the Episcopate—while, as a magistrate, he was prohibited by a law of Constantine from entering the ranks of the clergy. The way was therefore barred by a two-fold impediment.

Determined to escape the enthusiasm of the people, he thought of diverting it by seeming unworthy of it. It was the hour to attend the Prætorium and, followed by the crowd, he left the church. Contrary to his habit he treated with great harshness an accused man brought before him, even ordering him to be put to the question. But it was all in vain. The people, in the words used by the Jews in Pilate's court, only cried: "Your sins be on us"; some adding with gentle derision, "You will be baptized now since you have not been before, and to-day's sin will be remitted with all others you have ever committed."

Next day he had recourse to another stratagem. He caused certain women of suspicious character, such as never before had crossed his threshold, to be brought openly into his house. But the deception was too palpable. That in a fit of irritation Ambrose might be harsh was just possible, but a libertine, never. His next expedient was less forced, more consonant with his character. There was another way beside the Priesthood of consecrating life to the service of the Church, and one of his contemporaries tells us he seriously thought of hiding himself in the *Profession of Philosophy*, i.e. in the austerities of religious solitude.

Leaving Milan at night, he wandered forth to seek some spot where he would be hidden from his pursuers. But at daybreak next morning he found himself at the gates of Milan instead of far on his way to Pavia as he expected. In the dark and without a guide, he had retraced his steps. He was recognised and carried back by force to his house, and after this, watch was kept upon him.

Confronted by all this enthusiasm, the bishops felt compelled to ratify the popular choice. Ambrose says himself, "Rule was over-ridden by emotion."<sup>1</sup>

The next step was to report the election to the Emperor. He approved without hesitation, glad that the spiritual authority should be in the hands of a magistrate he had chosen himself and on whom he knew he could rely to exercise it without interfering with the secular power; to put an end to further scruple or indecision on the part of the Bishop-elect he therefore wrote him an autograph letter, assuring him that he would guarantee him a tranquil Episcopate. He also instructed the *Vicarius* of the province to take proper measures for carrying out the election, and that without regard to any opposition either Ambrose himself or any one else, might make to it. When the Emperor's letter reached Milan, Ambrose was not there. Again he had eluded the vigilance of his sentinels and was hiding in the country house of a friend, hoping to escape detection. But in consequence of the Emperor's command, his host himself betrayed him.

<sup>1</sup> Non valuit præceptio, prævaluit impressio. — Ep. lxiii., No. 65.

After this, recognising the will of God in the unanimity of Emperor and people, Ambrose made no further difficulty. Even the interval between baptism and ordination required by the Church's rule was denied him; a week after he was baptized he was raised to the priesthood. He was to regret and accuse himself of this precipitance all his life.<sup>1</sup> "Behold one," he says, speaking of himself, "whom the Church has not nurtured in her school, one who has not been subject to her yoke from his youth, who was accustomed to no Psalms, no Canticles but the voice of the criers in the Law Courts, who now stands, but only by the Grace of Christ, in the power of the Priesthood and reclines among the Faithful at the Heavenly Banquet. O Lord, keep, preserve the gift bestowed on him while yet he fled from Thee."

He lost not a single day in showing himself worthy of the trust he had not sought. He had always led a grave irreproachable life, but the day after his election he began one of penance, austerity and privation. All his ready money he distributed to the poor, his capital he bequeathed to them, subject to a life interest vested in his sister Marcellina, on whose good use of it he knew he could count.

A divided Flock had unanimously elected him, but he hastened to dispel any possible illusion as to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce ille non in ecclesia nutritus, non edomitus a puero, sed in tribunalibus præconis voce ad psalmitas assuefactus canticum, in sacerdotio manet sed gratia Christe et inter convivas mensæ cælestis recumbit. Serva, Domine, custodi donum quod constituisti etiam refugienti.*—"De Pœnitentia," L. ii., ch. viii.

course he meant to pursue. Almost his first act was to send messengers to Basil, the light and leader of the Church of the East, to solicit his aid in recovering the body of Dionysius, the banished Bishop of Milan, who died, a confessor to the Faith, in an obscure Armenian town. The precious remains were found and taken to Milan with every token of respect, accompanied by an eloquent letter from Basil calling on Ambrose, almost in the accents of an investiture, to take his stand at the post of danger among Defenders of the Faith.

“Let us give glory to God,” he wrote, “Who calls out of each generation the men worthy of His choice. He chose him who was to be Prince of His people from among shepherds; He chose Amos, a prophet whom He filled with His Holy Spirit from among goatherds; and, in our own day, He has sought in a royal city one set over others to govern, and who by reason of his superior mind, his illustrious descent, his wealth, his eloquent speech, held the highest rank. Go, therefore, O Man of God, Thou chosen of the Lord from among secular judges, go sit in the chair of the Apostles, fight the good fight, and if thy people have suffered from the contagion of the Arian folly, be it thy part to heal them.”<sup>1</sup>

Ambrose soon was called upon to give proof of the Christian virility Basil attributed to him. Valentinian had promised him a quiet Episcopate, but very soon after his election the Emperor died suddenly of apoplexy, in the middle of a campaign against the Sarmatians who had invaded Pannonia.<sup>2</sup> He left

<sup>1</sup> St Basil, Ep. cvii.

<sup>2</sup> Valentinian I. died A.D. 375.

two sons, neither of whom seemed at all capable of taking up the burden of succession. The elder, Gratian, had been nominally associated with his father in the government, but was barely sixteen; Valentinian, the younger son, not born of the same mother, was only four. Naturally a gentle-minded, straight-forward youth, Gratian at once revealed the weak side of his character by agreeing to share the Imperial dignity with his step-brother, or nominally with him, for the child was still completely in the hands of his mother Justina. The late Emperor had married this woman contrary to the law of the Church while his first wife was still alive; she was jealous and ambitious, and instead of being touched by the affection Gratian had evinced for his brother, she hated him as the son of the rival she had supplanted. Gradually a faction, that soon was embittered by religious rancour, gathered round her. For, when at the very outset of his reign Gratian showed his intention of observing the true Faith, the unorthodox party, already offended by the new Bishop's uncompromising attitude, rallied round the younger Emperor's mother, hoping to turn to account any power she might possess.

Emboldened by her support, not at first given openly, this party plucked up courage to claim the continued use of a Basilica from which, as they already were in possession, they asserted it would be unfair to oust them. Ambrose met this claim by a direct appeal to the Emperor, calling on him to forbid the scandal of a rival chair, which would be a flagrant defiance to his Episcopal authority.

Gratian dealt with the difficulty with an irresolution which plainly shows he could never have exercised the sovereign power alone. He ordered the Basilica to be sequestered and closed to both parties, and promised to pronounce in favour of one or other when next he came to Milan.

It was a situation that might easily have developed into serious disorder, had not strange tidings arrived from the East to divert public attention and bring prominently forward the value of Ambrose's services to State and Church.

Valentinian, elected by a sudden military rising, had felt himself unequal to the task of governing the whole Empire, and he adopted a practice that, with extended conquest, had become almost inevitable. He divided the Imperial authority, made his brother Valens Emperor of the East, with his seat of government at Constantinople. Valens, a man of very inferior character to Valentinian, had none of the qualities by which the latter succeeded in making his authority respected, and, falling under sectarian and Court influences like Constans, he far surpassed that Emperor in his violent defence of heresy. The Eastern Church became, under his rule, a scene of perpetual and sanguinary persecution. His conflict with Basil of Cæsarea had attracted universal attention, and he had been obliged to retreat from the encounter in deference to the illustrious Bishop's popularity. This had been an exasperating blow to his pride, and unforeseen circumstances arising, his almost exclusive absorption in religious matters quite outside his legitimate province led him



into the commission of a very disastrous political blunder.

Among the nations settled on the confines of Roman territory and which were a constant menace to the integrity of the Empire, none equalled the Goths in strength. But if not altogether desirable, they were at least possible neighbours. By a privilege, almost restricted to them, they were admitted to relations with the Empire, often stormy in character it is true, but more or less regular. Their form of government was a monarchy, and a king was convenient to treat with. The too frequently depleted ranks of the Roman legions could occasionally be replenished within their borders. Finally, most of the tribes were converts to the Christian Faith, devoted missionaries having visited them, and one of themselves, Ulphilas by name, had been raised to the dignity of the Episcopate.

From these various causes this semi-lawless people had almost ceased to be a danger to the Imperial frontier, when they themselves became a prey to invasion. A barbarian horde, from a far-off country, men of unknown race and fierce aspect, descended on them carrying rapine and massacre wherever they went. These barbarians were called Huns, a name hard to pronounce and harder still to write in Greek.

In Constantinople the news of this invasion was received with some apprehension, but this became absolute terror when Bishop Ulphilas, at the head of a deputation, arrived there and announced that, unable to repel their fierce aggressors, the Goths

asked for asylum in Imperial territory, promising on their part to live as loyal, submissive subjects within any limits assigned them.<sup>1</sup>

This extraordinary proposal, as may be supposed, threw dismay into the Imperial Council. The Goths, so recently enemies, were hardly to be relied on as allies, still less accepted as compatriots. And, however sincere their present intention, how could they pledge themselves to observe laws and customs of which they knew nothing? What hope was there of lasting peace or of any community of interests with such associates? The Emperor's wiser counsellors told him it would be the introduction of wolves into the fold. But others, carrying prudence over the borders of timidity, suggested that the Goths, armed and strong, might force the passage of the Danube if they chose, and that it was better to accept their terms now, than to wait to be coerced afterwards.

With characteristic indecision, Valens struck a middle course between these opinions. The Goths should be admitted, but the fulfilment of two conditions should act as a check upon them. Before setting foot on Imperial soil they must lay down their arms, and, being already Christians, they must promise to accept the formulary of faith the Emperor himself professed, and refrain from swelling the ranks of his opponents.

This second condition the Emperor had most at heart, and it was accepted without difficulty. The Goths, in their simplicity, knew little about theology,

<sup>1</sup> Invasion of Goths and Battle of Adrianople, ap. A.D. 376.

they relied on their bishop's teaching. He, for his part, had attended certain councils and religious assemblies, but his life had been chiefly spent in a remote country, and he had purposely kept aloof from controversy. The attenuated Arian formulary seemed to him acceptable, possibly because he was not very familiar with the nice distinctions of the Greek language. "These quarrels," he said, "all come of intrigue and ambition. I see no reason for refusing to do what the Emperor asks."

The other condition was, however, a very different matter, and it soon was apparent that the Goths were more tenacious of their arms than of their religion. The full import of their engagement had not perhaps been explained to them, and when the time came to fulfil it they absolutely refused. Ships had been sent for them, and when they disembarked on Roman soil with their wives, children and baggage, they carried their arms, and were, moreover, such a multitude, that to keep them within the prescribed limits proved hopeless. Like a huge wave they overspread the land, the panic-stricken natives abandoning their homes and flying before them. The Imperial police did indeed make some attempt to reduce them to order, but, crying that they were betrayed, they gathered round their captains and made ready to fight.

Here was the barbarian invasion, that hitherto had been only a dread possibility, an accomplished fact. Until now the foe had been always driven back, the sacred soil of the Empire preserved intact. But this invasion had not even been re-

sisted; natural and artificial defences had proved no barrier to it. It was already in the very heart of the Empire, seething to the very gates of one of the capitals; Roman supremacy itself was endangered. It was such an alarming crisis that Valens, distracted at the consequences of his own folly, sent to Gratian, conjuring him by his duty to the Empire to lend assistance in a common danger. This desperate appeal filled the youthful Emperor of the West with consternation. He had never commanded an army, and he was suddenly called on to put himself at the head of one and start off for a distant country to fight an unknown enemy, whose very name was a terror. Counsel was freely bestowed on him, some prudent, some almost pusillanimous. If he left his own provinces, it was asked, who could guarantee their security? Were not his own frontiers always in danger? Were there no barbarians on those of Gaul? And would the Rhine be a more effectual barrier against the Franks than the Danube against the Goths?

The effect of these suggestions on a not very strong-minded youth was calculated, but ultimately duty triumphed and Gratian sent off reinforcements to the East, promising to follow himself in spring with all the troops he could muster.

But another trouble, and one that perhaps caused him still more anxiety, presented itself to his mind. In the East, should he be dragged into the religious disputes provoked by Valens and of which some echo had reached him? Carefully shielded from the disturbing element of doubt and brought up in

the Catholic Faith by his father's orders, he had received all that he was taught with the simplicity of a child. But how was he to conduct himself in the arena of controversy, and how should he detect error when it assumed the garb of truth?

In his perplexity he thought of Ambrose. His father had held his talents in high esteem, and the Catholics about the Emperor's own person respected him already for the acts by which he had inaugurated his Episcopate. He wrote, therefore, to him, asking for such instruction in the controversy as would guide and confirm his faith.

This appeal from a young Sovereign on the threshold of his reign and about to embark in a war, was a revelation of simplicity and delicacy of conscience that met with ready response. Both as a Christian and a magistrate the news from the East had excited the indignation and surprise of Ambrose. He shared the common opinion of the age that Roman rule, the *Pax Romana*, exclusively represented what we now call civilisation, an alliance of facts and ideas, that are the elements of order, light and progress. Outside it no society deserving the name could be imagined, and this admission of armed barbarians, openly waving their banners, was a scandal without precedent in the history of his country familiar to him from childhood, a scandal such as history had never even foreseen.

And if it had been disgraceful to submit to the inroad, the religious condition imposed on the invaders was not of a nature to calm his emotion. The ranks of heresy, too full already, were to be

fortified by these strange neophytes. Moral and material disorder were to join hands in an alliance of Arian and Goth. Was it not already rumoured that the bishops were smoothing over difficulties by accepting presents from the invaders, that they were even wearing the necklets, bracelets, tokens of honour they offered them? "As Priests," cries Ambrose, "it is sacrilege; to the Roman name abhorrent."<sup>1</sup>

He sent Gratian the instructions he asked for. The letter still exists, but in a much developed form. It became a formal treatise proving the Divinity of Christ by philosophical reasoning, supported by numerous quotations from the Old and New Testaments. The deductions are very learned, but there is no mistaking the strong personal emotions running all through the treatise. It is a fervent exhortation to a young soldier to enter the lists as champion of the Empire and the Faith, as the avenger of Rome and the Lord Jesus Christ, a battle-song both pious and patriotic, the hymn of another Tyrtæus inciting the sacred band. In his picture of the evils Gratian will have to contend against, he hardly seems more indignant with the Christian sovereign who has violated the sanctity of religion, than with the barbarians for their outrages and excesses. Misfortune, he thinks, has followed in the wake of error.

"I do not wish," he writes to Gratian, "to delay you further in your ardour to gather the trophies

<sup>1</sup> Quod non solum in sacerdote, sacrilegium est et abhorret a nomine Romano.—Epist. x., No. 9.

that wait for you among the barbarians. Go, pious Emperor, with the shield of faith for your defence, with the spirit of strength as your armour. Treachery has brought us into this evil case. But through the firmness of your faith will come help; for we plainly see that in those localities where faith towards God has not been kept He has in His Divine wrath allowed faith in the Empire to totter.<sup>1</sup> Need I here remind you of the death, torments, exile suffered by so many confessors? Do we not know that Dacia, Mysia, Pannonia, all the frontiers of Thrace, now resound with equal horror to the sacrilegious prayers and tumultuous clamour of the barbarians.<sup>2</sup>

“What good was to be looked for in such unhappy amalgamation? What security could there be for the *res Romana* in the keeping of such guardians? But it suffices to have shown that where the Faith is assailed, there nothing is safe. Arise now therefore, O Lord, and unfurl Thy Standard. Not now shall lead our armies the military eagles, not the flight of birds, but Thy Name, O Lord Jesus, which our armies invoke, and Thy Cross which goes before them. They go forth to defend, not an infidel region, but Italy, whence have gone out so many confessors, Italy so often threatened but never overcome, because Thou hast defended it against the barbarian foe, and again, O Lord, do Thou avenge it.”

<sup>1</sup> Ibi primum fides romano imperio frangeretur ubi fracta est Deo.—“De Fide,” c. xvi. 136 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Totum illum limitem sacrilegio pariter vocibus et Barbaricis motibus audivimus inhorrentem.—“De Fide,” L. ii., cxvi. 130 *et seq.*

But Divine Providence did not see fit to grant these prayers. Gratian duly started to fulfil his promise, but he was delayed on the march. Some Frankish bands which had made an incursion across the frontier had to be driven back, and by the time he reached the place where he expected to meet Valens, a disaster so formidable that it affected the whole Empire had occurred.<sup>1</sup>

The Goths, imprudently attacked on the Plains of Adrianople, had routed the Romans; then, secure of victory and superior in numbers, they surrounded the defeated legions and set fire to the scrub that grew all over the battlefield. Finding themselves encircled in flames, the Romans were seized with panic. Cavalry, infantry, generals, inferior officers either fled or gave themselves up, everything but personal safety forgotten. Valens himself, struck by an arrow early in the day and carried to a hut to have his wound dressed, was abandoned in the general flight and was burnt to death in his rude couch, not even a trace of his remains being afterwards found.

To the popular imagination the disaster seemed all the more terrible as a direct manifestation of Divine Justice. "Since Cannæ," says the historian Ammianus Marcellinus, "the Republic has suffered no such defeat." And such was the general impression. The road to Byzantium was open, the country around it despoiled to the very gates. Pillage, famine, pestilence followed in each other's steps. A mortal blow had been struck, Rome itself was doomed.

<sup>1</sup> Ap. A.D. 378.



Fugitives came with terrible accounts of the numbers slaughtered and taken prisoners by the barbarians. Italy was not safe, at any moment the conqueror might enter her borders. Rude earth-works were hastily thrown up, the Tyrolese gorges were choked with felled trees to make them impassable.

The grief of Ambrose was great. To him it was the abomination of desolation, foretold in Scripture. "Who," he writes, "better than ourselves can testify to the truth of those divine words, for on us, it seems, have fallen the last days. Was such confusion ever seen before? The Huns rise against the Alans, the Alans against the Goths. The exile of one causes the flight of the other. The world is set to its fall and we behold the signs of its dissolution."<sup>1</sup>

Then recovering the calmer tone of a Christian soul, he adds: "But were it the deluge, we ought to imitate Noë and build ourselves an ark from which to watch in peace the revolutions that overtake the world."

But he did more than utter lamentations. Destitute fugitives poured in, and his charity towards them knew no bounds. Still more unfortunate were the conqueror's captives. They were treated like slaves, sold by auction in the markets, the weakness of children, the chastity of women were not respected. Ambrose had no money of his own left to ransom them. But his Church possessed vessels of gold

<sup>1</sup> Verborum autem cælestium nulli magis quam nos testis sumus quos mundi finis invenit: in occasu sumus, præcedunt quædam signa ægritudinis mundi.—Exp. in Lucani x., "de Noe et arca," L. i., 10.

and other precious materials, the gifts of the Faithful, and, choosing such of these as were not consecrated to sacred use, with spirited generosity he had them broken up and the ingots thus obtained he used instead of money to buy all the captives he could. He was afterwards reproached with having disposed of property belonging not to himself but the Church. But he asked indignantly, whether for the sake of a little gold souls were to be lost? "If the Church possesses gold," he added, "it is to use it for the poor, not to keep it. He who sent forth His Apostles without gold, without gold too founded His churches."<sup>1</sup>

But the condition of the Empire proved, after all, not so very desperate. It was too strong a body, too full of vital sap to perish at the first blow, and had still a whole century to run.

The invasion was in fact self-destructive. Unaccustomed to restraint or discipline, the barbarians scattered wherever they expected to find plunder, and meantime the Roman legions rallied in fortified situations and waited for reinforcements from Asia. Valens had provoked the concentration of the tribes by direct attack, but there was no renewal of this blunder. They were allowed to scatter and, at the favourable moment, dealt with separately and subdued or absorbed into the military or civil service of the government. It was a process requiring time, patience, and a personal supervision Gratian could

<sup>1</sup> *Aurum Ecclesia habet non ut servet, sed ut subveniat in necessitatibus . . . qui sine auro misit apostolos, Ecclesias sine auro congregavit.*—"De Off. min.," L. ii., 136, 137.

not give. His presence was necessary in Gaul where the frontier, guarded by untrustworthy troops, was in a state of insecurity. He had never expected to be Emperor of the East, he was not at home there; he felt no inclination to undertake a task he felt beyond his power. He hastened, therefore, to appoint a colleague to whose shoulders he might shift the burden so inopportunately laid on his own.

He was influenced in his choice only by a sincere desire to promote the public good. Theodosius<sup>1</sup> was the son of a favourite general of Valentinian, whom that passionate Emperor, after years of esteem and confidence, had caused to be executed for complicity in a plot, real or supposed. His son had nobly elected to share his father's disgrace and, after his death, retired to Spain, where he still was when news of the dignity conferred on him reached him. He was with great difficulty brought to accept it and only yielded to great pressure, and no sooner had he consented than Gratian handed over the government and hurried back to the West. Not, however, before he had issued a solemn edict abrogating all proscriptive measures instituted by Valens against Catholics, and establishing perfect freedom of worship for all Christians without distinction.<sup>2</sup> This was an act of reparation almost demanded by public sentiment, the general feeling being that, in retribution for the prevarications of so many successive sovereigns, Divine Justice had punished the Empire by misfortune. It was a senti-

<sup>1</sup> Theodosius began his reign, 379 A.D.

<sup>2</sup> Three small sects were excepted from the edict, for what reason is not known.

ment Gratian himself shared, and, directly he arrived at Trêves, where he was to stay some time, he took steps to confirm the constancy of his own faith. The lucidity and power of Ambrose's instructions had so struck him that he now wrote asking him to come and complete his teaching. "I wish, pious Pontiff," he wrote, "to enjoy your presence, who, even absent, have occupied my thoughts and memory. Hasten, then, to come to me to teach me the true doctrine. Not that I desire to search into vain disputes to adore God in words rather than with the sentiments of the soul, but that my heart may open more and more to the knowledge and revelation of the Divinity."<sup>1</sup>

The appeal was pressing, but Ambrose hesitated. The Courts of Constantius and Valens had been too much frequented by bishops to their own deterioration. Pagans, rhetoricians, frequented the same Courts with the tribute of their adulations. Ambrose was reluctant to form part of any such mixed society. He therefore excused himself in a letter in which deference to the Prince is skilfully blended with fatherly affection for one of the Faithful.

"If," he writes, "I have not come into the presence of your Clemency, pious Emperor, it is not from lack of affection; discretion has retained me. But I have been present with you unceasingly in prayer and aspiration, the manner best becoming a priest to render you what is due to you. But what am I saying? When have I not been with you? I followed you on the march, hour by hour.

<sup>1</sup> Ep. i. i.

I was in the camp with you by day and by night. I watched unceasingly over you by my prayers. If I have no other merit, at least my affection has served you. And for our own safety also, we pray with yours. Do not regard these as flattering words; you would not like such, and I should regard them as unworthy of my ministry. But He Who knows all our thoughts, He Whom you confess and adore as I do, knows to what depths my heart is moved by all that touches your faith, your safety, your glory."<sup>1</sup>

He then goes on to say he will apply himself to the task the Emperor wishes to have completed, and that, so soon as he has proved the Divine Nature of the Holy Spirit, as he has already that of Christ, he will bring his finished work to the Emperor.

But the Emperor did not wait. The bishop would not come to him, he came to the bishop. By the close of the year, that of his return from the West, he was in Milan. Other serious matters perhaps determined his plans, for, by geographical position, Milan was a central point in the Western Empire; but there is nothing forced in the supposition that his desire to converse with Ambrose was an important factor in bringing him so soon to Milan, and there is no doubt at all that it was the ascendancy Ambrose soon acquired over him which made him stay there.

The favourite of a certain French queen was once asked what charm she had used to captivate her

<sup>1</sup> Ep. i. i.

Royal mistress and hold her under her sway. "I have only used the power a strong mind has over a weak one," was the answer. Had a similar question been put to Ambrose he would never have answered with this mingled contempt and presumption, but, nevertheless, the words exactly describe his influence over the Emperor.

Gratian came to him laden with all the anxieties of inexperienced youth and a timorous conscience, and Ambrose received him, not only with the spiritual authority of his priesthood, but with a political wisdom acquired by practical experience. It was a combination then unprecedented, but of which, in later times, the higher ranks of the hierarchy have furnished other brilliant examples.

Gratian was not slow to recognise the value of his advice in secular affairs as well as his wonderful insight in the direction of conscience, and soon surrounded him with every mark of a confidence and affectionate respect that Ambrose had no legitimate reason for refusing, but which he certainly had not sought. The favour, the credit thus thrust on him marked him for a Providential *rôle* in stemming the tide of misfortune still threatening both Church and State. The tie between him and the Emperor soon became a very close one. Gratian left Milan only for short absences while engaged in military excursions, and Ambrose had free access to his palace. Even in purely political matters, we find the bishop's guiding hand altering the tone of legislation, and Gratian's policy, hesitating and inconsequent before, becoming firmer and less dis-

connected. This tutelage is most plainly visible in acts that affect the interests of religion, in the relief of the Church from hampering proscriptions, in the abolition from public life of the traces of pagan worship. In the services he rendered to religion and the State, Ambrose identified a cause common to both, followed one purpose. By conformity to Christian rules the stability of the Empire might still be maintained. If the Head of the State were thoroughly Christianised and took his stand on the Rock the Church is built upon, the tottering foundations of the Empire might be steadied.

In one striking incident, Rome, the vital centre of the Empire, was herself accessory to the Christianising movement that was the death warrant of her traditionary worship. From time immemorial, even from the days of the Republic, an altar to the Goddess of Victory had always stood in the Hall of the Senate. Once, indeed, but for one day only, it had been veiled from sight because the Emperor Constans was passing through Rome. But Julian the Apostate succeeded Constans, and the altar still stood in its place. The Hall in which had been pronounced the grand decrees that took effect in the world's conquest seemed the right place to honour the Goddess of Victory. Even the Christian senators made no protest, excusing their toleration, it may be, on the plea of the strange confusion between fact and fancy, between divine honours and poetic allegory<sup>1</sup> which was such a curious feature of declining poly-

<sup>1</sup> Symmachus alludes to this distinction when he says: "*Reddatur nomini honor, qui numini denegatus est.*"

theism. But, on a certain day, the senators met to find the altar gone from the Hall. The surprise and emotion excited were intense, and it was decided, then and there, to send deputies to protest to the Emperor against so unforeseen an exercise of his prerogative. Confronted by this storm of feeling and the imminent danger of a popular rising, the Christian senators refrained from interference, and only sent to inform their bishop, Pope Damasus, of what had taken place, asking him, at the same time, to explain their reserve to the Emperor.

The delegates arrived in Milan, bringing with them a resolution that might be called unanimous, inasmuch as no dissentient voice had been raised against it. But to their chagrin, they found the palace gates closed against them. "Wicked men" had done it, they said in their account of it. One of these wicked men, or rather the one person whom everyone recognised as responsible for these proceedings, was Ambrose. And very shortly afterwards, through the same influence, they culminated in the suppression of the revenues attached to the service of the altar and its attendant priests and vestals.

Paganism thus defied behind its last sheltering rampart, heresy was next attacked in the stronghold where it appeared most capable of self-defence. The Empress Justina had, as already related, gathered round her son Valentinian a small opposition Court, the seat of which she fixed in Sirmium. To this place Ambrose was invited to consecrate a bishop chosen from the ranks of the Catholic party,



whose election the Empress had made every effort to frustrate. On the day appointed for the ceremony the church was filled with a hostile crowd who received Ambrose with cries and threats.

One of a group of excited women went so far as to put her hand out and catch the bishop by his mantle to prevent his taking the seat reserved for him. "Touch me not," he said, looking at the offender, "I am a priest, however unworthy, and against a priest you have no right to stretch out your hand. Beware lest God punish you with some great misfortune." The ceremony was then allowed to conclude and there was no further uproar. A few days later the woman, who had been terribly frightened by Ambrose's words and the look he gave her, fell ill; and when her sickness proved mortal it was, as may be supposed, ascribed to his threat of Divine punishment. After this, wherever his influence reached, the Arian heresy rapidly disappeared. A few bishops still professed it, but were deposed by the joint action of all the Episcopate of North Italy, who, with the Emperor's sanction, met in Aquileia under the presidency of Ambrose.

Soon he could go nowhere without a troop of followers. Some were beggars of various kinds and degrees, others only grateful for past favours. His charity made no distinction of creed or class. An unfortunate pagan was on the point of being executed for some incautious words about the Emperor, and, hearing of it, he hurried to the palace to beg that he might be pardoned. The Emperor was just starting to hunt, and, according

to a standing order, would see no one. It was his favourite pastime and nothing was ever allowed to interfere with it. But, following a huntsman leading hounds, Ambrose contrived to slip through a back gate without giving the day's password, and appeared unannounced before the Emperor. For once Gratian seemed displeased with him, and when he had heard his petition, answered with some asperity that the man had insulted him. "All the more reason for forgiving him," answered Ambrose. This persistency saved the man's life.

But not only people of humble condition came to Ambrose for help. His influence was also sought by his Episcopal brethren and his former colleagues. Several letters addressed to him are to be found in the correspondence of Symmachus, the Prefect of Rome (not the Symmachus mentioned before, but his son who had inherited his office). "Do not wonder at my importunity," he wrote to Ambrose, recommending to him some friends of his who were in great trouble. "I know how faithful you are in discharging the kind offices you take in hand, but one application never satisfies people who are in trouble. Those in need implore the support of those who enjoy universal respect."<sup>1</sup>

All who presented their petitions in person, as well as other visitors, were received with gracious hospitality. His house, a modest structure, followed the inside line of the city wall, and stood just where the Basilica dedicated to him was afterwards built.

<sup>1</sup> *Laborantibus una commendatio non sufficit. Opem desiderantes ad suffragia probata confugiunt.*—Sym. Epist., 35.

Here, in community with the chief clergy of his diocese, he lived; their table of the simplest description, and all Fasts severely observed. But, as a modern writer remarks, the former patrician awoke in him when distinguished guests were to be entertained. On these occasions he required his table to be served with the noble propriety befitting them. "Use hospitality freely rather than as of necessity," he wrote to a newly-made bishop who asked for his advice. "And above all, among priests there should be nothing vulgar, nothing plebeian, nothing in common with the manners and customs of the rude multitude."<sup>1</sup>

But not only as a sort of unofficial minister of State with an influence over Imperial decrees, was recourse had to the bishop. His independent arbitration between opposing parties was often sought. In a famous text St Paul reproaches the Corinthians with going to law against one another. "Is it so," he says, "that there is not among you any one wise man that is able to judge between his brethren?" The wise man in a Christian community was not far to seek. It was the bishop. Hence the very prevalent custom of intrusting to the chief pastor a kind of paternal jurisdiction, quite apart from the spiritual authority the Church gave him. The Faithful made him the confidant of their purely human interests that discord might not enter their

<sup>1</sup> *Hospitem voluntarie magis quam in necessitate esse oportere . . . nihil in sacerdotis plebeium requiris, nihil populare, nihil commune cum studio atque usu et moribus inconditæ multitudinis.*—*Epist. xix. 6, and xxviii. 2.*

families, and that in the regulation of their mutual rights the delicate instincts of conscience might prevail over the strict letter of the law.

In the hands of an Ambrose, who was also an expert and able jurist, the claims of justice and charity were, as might be expected, skilfully reconciled, and appeals to his "Episcopal audiences" (as these informal Courts were called) became more and more numerous. The lofty impartiality of his inquiries into the cases submitted to him is shown by correspondence still extant, and from this impartiality, ecclesiastical interests were not exempted. In one case a bishop of his province had made up his mind to leave his property to the Church, subject to a life payment of the interest to his sister, an arrangement which a disappointed brother contested as invalid. Ambrose being appealed to, made his first care the restoration of peace between the brothers. He decided that the life interest was to be paid to the sister, but that eventually the property should go to the brother; and when it was pointed out to him that the Church lost under this settlement: "The Church," he answered, "never loses when charity gains."

Sometimes, as in the following instance, his rebukes took the form of sarcasm. The creditors of an insolvent debtor refused to permit the burial of his body until their claims were satisfied in full. "Since the body is valuable to you," said Ambrose to the astonishment of all parties, "take it home with you, keep it, hide it lock it up in case anyone should try to rob you of it." This decision both

excited indignation against the creditors and put them into a position from which they were anxious to withdraw. But this Ambrose would not allow. He insisted upon their rendering the last offices to the dead man: "And then they can never say we robbed them of their rights," as he expressed it.<sup>1</sup>

But these functions, outside the strict limits of the Church's sphere, were never allowed to interfere with the zealous fulfilment of the duties of his sacred ministry. He preached almost every day, as is shown by his commentaries on the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, on the Psalms, and on the Gospel of St Luke. His sermons attracted not only the multitude, but the upper classes and the most distinguished intellects in Milan. It was his practice also to give simple familiar instructions to catechumens, to prepare them for the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. But whatever the subject he preached upon, it was always with the same luminous precision, and a peculiar sweetness that one of his listeners, a young man afterwards to become very famous, mentions: "I listened to his words," says Augustine, "and hung upon their sweetness."<sup>2</sup>

For the first time a Christian preacher used the Latin idiom with brilliant oratorical effect. In the Eastern Church, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen and Chrysostom, preaching in Greek, had spoken in

<sup>1</sup> *Ne forte quererentur fraudatos esse.*—"De Tobia," x. 37.

<sup>2</sup> "*Verbis ejus suspendebar intentus et delectabar suavitate sermonis,*" St Augustine says in his Confessions, describing the influence Ambrose had in his conversion.

accents worthy of the great geniuses of the past. But in Rome, eloquence, or what still passed under that name, was confined to rhetoricians, pagan for the most part, who in language of antiquated form, affected ornament and laboured antitheses intended to be startling, celebrated the virtues of the great or the passing events of the moment. It was a class of oratory, artificial, false, that had always been displeasing to Ambrose, and which he would never have admitted in preaching the Gospel.

"Let there be no false ornament," he said, "the natural must be allowed to speak; and if the natural have faults, they can be corrected without recourse to the artificial."

"Your voice," he says elsewhere, "must not be pitched now too high, now too low, nor be in any way like a woman's. It must keep a certain form, rule and manly vigour."<sup>1</sup>

The collected works of Ambrose fill two large folio volumes, and one cannot but wonder how he found time for the preparatory study that these treatises and other writings must have demanded. He probably had the gift of utilising for such purpose the scattered leisure moments of a life designedly lent to interruption. To quote once more the "young man" who listened with such admiration to his sermons:

"I held Ambrose in esteem," wrote St Augustine,

<sup>1</sup> Desit affectatio, sed motis sit purus et simplex. Nihil enim fucatum placet. Si quid in natura vitii est industria emendet. . . . Vox ipsa non remissa, non fracta, nihil femineum sonans. Sed quandam formam et regulam ac succum virilem reservans.—"De officiis ministrorum," L. i., 75, 84.

“but it was impossible for me to converse with him of the things I wished, or as I wished. He was surrounded by an army of needy persons who kept me from him. He was the servant of their infirmities, and, when they spared him a few moments for himself, he gave his body the food necessary for its support, and nourished his soul with reading.<sup>1</sup> But when he read, his eye ran over the pages while his soul penetrated their meaning. Often when I entered his retreat I found him reading softly to himself. I would sit down, and after waiting and watching him for a long time in silence (for who would have dared to disturb attention so profound?) I would withdraw, fearing to importune him if I troubled him in the short time he reserved to himself, out of the tumult of his multifarious business, to collect his thoughts.”<sup>2</sup>

It was in these brief leisure moments, snatched from a life so opposed to meditation, that he prepared himself to write his tracts on dogma and morals, which, composed with all the art he had acquired from classic models, hold almost equal rank with his sermons among his works. The duality of his very original character is conspicuous in these treatises. At one moment we have before us the Saint—as in the treatise on virginity and widowhood—exhorting chosen souls and raising them to the height of the life of counsel and perfection. At the next, a practical man, accustomed to bear his share of the common

<sup>1</sup> Cum quibus quando non erat, quod perexiguum temporis erat, aut corpus reficiebat necessariis sustentaculis aut lectione animam.

<sup>2</sup> St Aug. Conf., L. vi., ch. iii.

obligations of civil life, showing how the fulfilment of these obligations may be made compatible with the fulfilment of Christian precept. One of his works especially shows this remarkable contrast of austere spirituality and practical common sense; a work in which he appears to have had the express intention of comparing the morality of the Gospel with that taught by philosophy.

The title, *De officiis ministrorum* ("of the duties of Priests") is almost the same as that of Cicero's most famous work on morals. The work is professedly addressed to those who aspire to the priesthood, but this is only an apparent limitation or one constantly overstepped. The faithful generally, and all other men as well, are concerned in the questions posed and the solutions offered.

He begins by laying down different categories of duty according to the plan adopted by Cicero, who only reproduced the ideas of Panetius, a philosopher whose works are now lost. Both these writers Ambrose quotes in recommendation of his own authority, but with the proviso that moral obligation derives from a source unknown to either Cicero or Panetius. This source is the Will of God, made known to man by His Word.

"Come, my children," he begins by saying, "I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Then he tells us that Cicero recognises two principles of action, the good and the useful. By both these principles, according to the Roman moralist, a man may examine an action he is about to perform, deciding, when they seem not to agree, on which principle he will act.



This is a distinction which Ambrose refuses to admit because nothing that is not good can be useful, since the useful is not that which contributes to any present profit, but that which contributes to eternal profit, *i.e.* to the possession of eternal life. Viewed from this point, all those advantages which men regard as useful—pleasure, power, riches, seem almost contrary to the truly useful, since they may lead men astray or corrupt them.

“Nothing in this world is anything. He who has little is not the less for it since what he loses is in reality nothing—where there is nothing to lose, there is no loss.”<sup>1</sup>

Having thus shown that all moral obligation emanates from a fixed principle—love of, and respect for the Divine Law—and that this principle governs every permitted or commanded human act, he passes on to apply this fundamental rule to the conditions of common life. This he does with consummate skill and moderation, showing that the Christian religion neither incapacitates a man for the fulfilment of his duty to the commonwealth, nor teaches him to shirk it—accusations brought against the faithful at the time, and renewed by modern writers who seek to deny the beneficent action of the early Church.

A great deal has been said and written about the repugnance of the early Christians to the profession

<sup>1</sup> *Nihil est quidquid in sæculo est—qui exiguum habet non minuit quia a nihil est quod amittit. Res sine dispendio, est quod totum dispendium est.—“De officiis ministrorum,” L. i., 28, 154, 155, 11, 15, 18.*

of arms, due, it is said, to their having so lost the virtue of patriotism, that the dangers and misfortunes of their country were matters of indifference to them. But this was a position so totally opposed to Ambrose's own that he would not admit the accusation. He treats of the virtue of courage under two heads: first, there is what he calls "domestic" courage, *i.e.*, the courage a man should exert over himself in ruling his passions and resisting the crushing influence of trial and misfortune; secondly, the "warlike" courage which confronts an enemy. "There are those," he says, "who hold only the latter in esteem: and as for us, it must not be believed that we also do not esteem it as if those who are ours were wanting in it" . . . then he proceeds to rebut any accusation of the sort by the examples of Josue, Gedeon and the Machabees. He strikes this same note again in one of his sermons. He is preaching on the passage of Scripture where we are told Christ did no miracles in his own country. "Not," he cried, "that it is to be believed of us that we regard love of country as a valueless sentiment. How could He, Who loved every man, have taught us not to love our fellow-citizens?"<sup>1</sup>

When he treats of the virtue, which, following Cicero, he calls "beneficence" (though "charity" must have been a word constantly on the lips of his hearers), he does not, like his Roman model, hedge it round with hard and fast restrictions—nor, like him, tell his hearers they must carefully

<sup>1</sup> Exp. Evang. sec. Lucam iv. 47.

proportion their gifts to their means not to defraud their heirs. "On the contrary," he says, "we must know how to deprive ourselves to give to others. We must search out the poor who hide. Great is your fault if you know that one of your brethren languishes in destitution, suffers hunger and privation, or is loaded with chains, perhaps carried out to execution on some unjust charge—when you might have been his rescuer had not you valued your money more than the life of a man.<sup>1</sup> No one should fear impoverishing himself by succouring the poor. For Christ was rich and made Himself poor that He might help us in our misery." This was language such as never had been heard from the lips of a Cicero, a Seneca, or even a Marcus Aurelius. Christians were, however, often blamed for their reckless charity to the undeserving and for the consequent waste of valuable funds, or sometimes of a family's whole patrimony. Upon this subject Ambrose, recalling, no doubt, former experiences in dealing with public monies, says: "It is clear that if liberality is not to degenerate into useless prodigality, it must be practised with some kind of measure. Strong men, who have no reason for leading vagabond lives, may often be seen coming to ask for the whole treasure of the poor, and if you give them a little they ask for more. . . . If you believe them too readily they will soon consume all you have to give in alms. Measure, therefore, your gifts in such manner that men like these are not sent away altogether empty-handed, and that the

<sup>1</sup> Plus apud te pecunia valeat quam vita morituri.

poor be not fraudulently despoiled of that which is all their living.”<sup>1</sup>

And this picture, how vivid it remains: “Some there are who say they have debts; make sure that these debts are not a mere pretence. Others say they have been robbed by brigands; but let them prove their injuries and show that they are in truth the persons wronged. To keep the ear open to those who ask is not enough; the eye must confirm the testimony of the ear. And, above all, you ought to seek out those who do not thrust themselves into sight, and those who blush to show themselves.”

These are the words of both the bishop and the former magistrate, and even the modern political economist might perhaps learn something from them. But Cicero recognises an inferior, or secondary order of social duties, to which he gave the name of *becomingness*, or, as we should say, good manners, good breeding. (The Greek *to prepon*, the Latin *quod decet*.) And here again Ambrose refuses to recognise his distinction. “Nothing is becoming,” says Ambrose, “that is not good; everything that is good is becoming. Becomingness is only the form, goodness the substance.” Then using a graceful and ingenious comparison, he adds: “Goodness is what health is to the body, good manners what beauty is—things not separable—where health decays beauty vanishes; take away the root and the flower dies.”

Very much to the point, also, are the rules he lays

<sup>1</sup> At neque ille inanes recedant, neque transcribatur vita pauperum in spolia fraudulentorum.—“De off. min.,” L. ii., 76 *et seq.*

down for his priests as to their exterior manners and deportment. They are to avoid hurry and bustle, their gestures must not be too vehement, their voices not too loud; they must never talk of themselves to their own advantage, never fish for compliments. All this is advice that not priests only, but other young men starting in life might lay to heart. And here again is a remark all can appreciate. "The soul speaks in the movements of the body."<sup>1</sup>

He closes these beautiful instructions with a description of the virtues and uses of friendship, too tender to be only appropriate to priests. It was written, very likely, to refute a prejudice prevalent at the time. The Christian system, it was said, was austere and hard; it taught men to substitute an intensely egotistic solicitude about their personal eternal welfare, for the natural sentiments of family affection and social duty—sentiments which ennoble our present life.

Against this painful travesty of the Christian system Ambrose protests with emotion, and following a practice he constantly adopts, draws attention to the relationship existing between a virtue apparently human and the Divine Law; then goes to Holy Scripture for his examples.

"My children," he says, "do not give up your friendship for your brethren: nothing human is more beautiful. Life has no consolation more precious than a friend to whom you can open your heart, confide your secrets, who rejoices with you in prosperity, grieves when you suffer, supports and

<sup>1</sup> Vox quædam est animi corporis motus.—"De off. min.," i. 71.

exhorts you in time of trial. What faithful friends were those young Hebrews whose friendship lived even in the fiery furnace! Has not David said, "Saul and Jonathan, lovely and comely in their life, even in death they were not divided." And has not our Lord said: "Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations?" Did not He Himself make friends to whom He said, "You are my friends if you do the thing that I command you," and "I have called you friends because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father I have made known to you.

This, then, is the true friend. He hides nothing. He pours out his whole soul, as Jesus Christ poured the mysteries of the Father into the souls of His disciples."<sup>1</sup>

About this time took place the early death of his brother Satyrus, and his own grief eloquently proves that between Christian detachment and great vivacity of human affection there is no necessary inconsistency. The brothers, as already said, had always been bound together by the closest friendship, and this affection had not been diminished by the change in Ambrose's career. Satyrus became, not only his constant adviser, but, by taking on himself a large share of the secular burden, he left Ambrose freer to discharge his pastoral functions.

At the funeral, which took place in Milan, Ambrose

<sup>1</sup> Nihil ergo occultat amicus, si verus est: effundit animam sicut effundebat mysteria Patris dominus Jesus.—"De off. min.," iii. 135.

would let no one but himself pronounce the oration spoken in presence of the beloved remains, and perhaps no words have ever given more living expression to intense natural grief and consoling faith.

In the opening sentences the very sob of his sorrow seems to fall on the ear: "Oh my brother, where shall I go? where shall I turn? The ox seeks the companion with whom he has been accustomed to wear the yoke, and calls for him again and again. And I, my brother, shall I forget you with whom I have so long shared the yoke of life? I weep, I confess, but our Lord too wept at the tomb of Lazarus who was his friend, and shall not I weep for him who is my brother?"

Then he goes into some touching details. The brothers had once been for a time separated, while Satyrus went on business to Africa. On the voyage home he was shipwrecked, saving his life only by swimming. For a time there had been uncertainty about his fate, and Ambrose now recalls the joy of his return after the fear that he was lost: "Oh deceptive joy! Oh perpetual uncertainty of human things! Africa did not keep thee; the sea gave thee back to us. We thought that nothing then would take thee from us, and it was on land that shipwreck lay in wait for us. It availed me nothing that, bending over thee, I received, I inhaled thy last sigh, that either I might take thy death or give thee my life.<sup>1</sup> O last embraces, supreme yet sweet pledges of our love; but how sad when still holding

<sup>1</sup> Aut tuam mortem ipse susciperem aut meam vitam in te transfuderem.—"De excess. Sat.," p. 19.

thee I felt thy members stiffen, thy breathing cease, and, while yet I stretched out my arms, him whom I pressed to my heart I had already lost." But after this torrent of grief it is the turn of Christian hope to speak. In the blow that strikes him he recognises the hand of an all-merciful Father. First he remembers how troubled, how difficult the times are. It may be that Satyrus has been taken just in time to escape falling into barbarian hands, or assisting at the destruction of the universe, the end of the world.<sup>1</sup> And, withdrawn from this present life, what was not that life on high to which he was called? "Let our tears cease then, for between those who believe and those who do not, those who serve Christ and those who serve idols, there should be some distinguishing mark. Let those weep unceasingly who think they have lost their friends for ever, let their grief have no end since they think death has none. But we, who think of death not as the end of human life but only as the end of this earthly life (for nature is transformed before our eyes, only to be born again), may find in death itself our consolation."

Then, just as the ceremony is drawing to a close, he glances once more at the beloved remains soon to be hidden in the ground. "Why longer delay?" he cries. "No doubt it is sweet to be able still to gaze on that beauty, that grace, of which even death has not yet been able to rob his beloved features. But the hour is come—let us go to the grave. Go,

<sup>1</sup> *Raptus est ne in manus incideret Barbarorum et ne totius orbis excidia, et mundi finem videret.*



then, my brother, go before me to that last common dwelling of us both, which to me henceforward shall be dearer than any other. Here below we have had all in common, there also may we not long be separated." <sup>1</sup>

We have said that Ambrose preached every day; but, besides this, he seized all other opportunities to edify his people by word and example. He had been eight years in Milan, five a bishop, when he went back to Rome for the first time; and we may imagine with what transformed feeling he revisited the familiar scenes he had quitted with hopes and plans so very unlike the career he had been called to embrace. His fame must already have travelled there, for his reception was a popular ovation. He was thronged by the crowd, everyone anxious to see and hear him; the poor hoping for alms, the sick to be cured, for a miraculous power was attributed to his prayers. With difficulty he escaped to take refuge in the house that had been the home of his youth, where his sister Marcellina was waiting for him alone. Their mother had died while he was away and he had been unable to be with her at the last.

The meeting between brother and sister, sad as it must have been in memories of the past, was relieved by at least one little gleam of humour. They remembered that when they were children playing together, Ambrose always chose the part of father or superior, and exacted a respect which Marcellina would not pay him. "I always told you that you would have to come to it," said he, "you

<sup>1</sup> De excess. Sat., p. 78.

are not going to refuse now to kiss your bishop's hand?"

His reception was partly due, no doubt, to his acknowledged credit with the Emperor. The people, trained to obedience, were always ready to pay obsequious homage to power. But a little later his popularity was put to the test, for the very reason that he was known to be one of Gratian's advisers. He was eight months in Rome, and, owing either to a bad harvest or to delay in the maritime transport of provisions on which the city largely depended for supplies, a famine occurred while he was there. Popular feeling rose and the pagan senators, still resenting the suppression of the altar to Victory, laid hold of the occasion to stir up an agitation that might have proved dangerous to Ambrose as the primary cause of the insult to the tutelary genius of Roman fortunes. But this danger was entirely averted by his marvellous charity in the distress. Not only did he give liberally himself, but his rich Christian friends and kinsfolk, responding to his exhortations, did the same, and when at last he left Rome, a grateful people followed him with their blessings.

## CHAPTER II

### DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

NEWS that caused him deep sorrow awaited him in Milan. But, however terrible, the events that had taken place need have astonished no one, for the history of the Empire had become a series of such convulsions.

Sedition had broken out among the legions encamped in Gaul. They had elected a new Emperor of their own choice, from whom, grounding their expectations on a custom familiar to them, they hoped for rewards. The Imperial purple had been bestowed on Maximus, a general, and like Theodosius, to whom he was said to be distantly related, a Spaniard. The cause of the absent Gratian found no defenders, and by the time he had hurried to the province the sedition was so general that only one official of any importance acknowledged him. This was the Governor of Lyons, who called heaven to witness and swore on the Gospels that he would be faithful to his Emperor. But it was in his house, that same night, that Gratian, at a supper given in his honour, was murdered by hired assassins who lay in wait to do the deed. He was struggling for his life and his voice failing when he was heard to utter the name of Ambrose, calling to him perhaps

with some dim idea of rescue, or to ask him to pray for his soul.

The blow fell with twofold force on Ambrose. He had loved the young Emperor personally, and had also hoped, in his reign, to see the union of the Church and Empire consolidated. The Arians and pagans, regarding him as the cause of every humiliation they had undergone in the late reign, openly rejoiced in his disappointment; and still more, when the Empress Justina, on whose support they had good reason to count, suddenly appeared on the scene. She brought her son with her and came to assert his right to his share of the Empire.

But almost simultaneously with her arrival, it became known she had gone to Ambrose. She went straight to him, in fact, leading her child by the hand, and putting him into the bishop's arms, implored him to be his protector.

It was a dramatically planned scene, requiring very little explanation. The Empress, terrified by Gratian's downfall, asked herself what might not be the fate awaiting her helpless child, if a prince in the full vigour of manhood had been so utterly powerless to defend himself. It was idle to dream of reconquering the territory already lost; but there was at least a chance that the usurper might be satisfied without encroaching on the rest of the Empire—Gaul, Spain, Great Britain would be no mean portion, and there was nothing new in this kind of partition; similar arrangements had been made more than once during the last century and a half. But if this arrangement was to be proposed

to Maximus it must be without delay. It would be fatal to wait until the revolt had crossed the Alps, penetrated into Italy and Africa, and infected the Danube provinces, as yet loyal to the memory of her son's father. Not a day was to be lost. But the commission was one requiring courage, skill, fidelity. Courage to venture inside the lines of the revolted legions; skill to obtain an audience and conduct the negotiations; fidelity to resist intimidation and bribery. Justina trusted none of her own courtiers and, Arian as she was, she appealed to the Church in the hour of her necessity. She had for years been carrying on a struggle with Ambrose, and her confidence in him now was an unwilling tribute to his courage, integrity and experience.

But these negotiations were no concern of his as a bishop, and he might refuse to have anything to do with them—might, indeed, think it his duty to do so. He did, in fact, hesitate, but reason triumphed over his scruples.

It was a perilous undertaking but it was the defence of the weak, the proof that Ambrose forgave injuries.

It has been remarked that this was the first time a minister belonging to the Kingdom "not of this world" ever played any part in the delimitation of political frontiers. But if so, it was in the cause of the widow and orphan that this new phase in the Church's history was inaugurated. It was civilised society itself threatened by the barbarian hordes, the weak and defenceless everywhere that

in later times sought and obtained the same protection.

The season was advanced and unusually severe, but, in spite of the difficulties attending the passage of the Alps and northern travelling, the Embassy, consisting of Ambrose and the Count du Bauton, started at once. Ambrose performed his mission with tact and skill; but the difficulties were less formidable than had been anticipated. Maximus was, in fact, too utterly surprised at the turn his fortunes had taken, too well satisfied with a series of easy successes, to care to incur further risks.

Before Ambrose and his colleague arrived, he had already despatched a messenger to Justina with proposals for an arrangement of some kind. His messenger, Count Victor (a military man), and the Empress's envoys met at Mayence, but Ambrose made no attempt to induce Victor to discontinue his journey. On the contrary, he thought it better he should see the Empress; and, urgent as immediate action had seemed, it appeared no less to him important to avoid hurrying matters to a conclusion. Justina required time to organise her plans of defence, to fortify the Alpine passes, and also to make sure of the support of Theodosius, with whom Gratian had always been careful to keep on good terms.

Maximus was at Trêves, and when Ambrose arrived there he very soon perceived that the new Emperor, although quite ready to make peace, wished to have the credit of doing so as a favour. It was the foible of a man suddenly raised to an exalted position, and Ambrose understood how to deal with it. Accustomed

as he long had been to tokens of respect wherever he went, he avoided showing any resentment at the studied discourtesy of his reception at a public consistory, among a crowd of petitioners and courtiers. "Why," began Maximus in a tone of contemptuous pity, "did not Valentinian himself come? I would have received him as a father." The derisive import of this question was clear; a hostage in the hands of the murderers of his brother, Valentinian would have had small chance of escaping a like fate. But, controlling his indignation, Ambrose calmly replied, "He could not come without his mother, and in these troubled times, and at this rigorous season of the year, could a woman and child travel?" "We will wait then," said Maximus scornfully, "until we see what news Victor brings back."

Months passed in this delay, Justina skilfully spinning out the negotiations, but leaving Ambrose meantime at the mercy of the arrogant soldier whose displeasure he had had the temerity to brave. Nor was he allowed to leave until after the return of the Emperor's envoy with proposals that, for the time at any rate, were accepted.

The trying months at Trêves had not, however, been lost. Maximus had seen on reflection the folly of further aggression, and Justina had taken advantage of the interval to have all the passes of the Alps strictly guarded.<sup>1</sup>

All this time other persons had been as busy if less profitably employed than Ambrose. The votaries of

<sup>1</sup> *Milites utriusque partis qui custodirent juga montium offendi revertens.*—Epist. xxiv. 7.

the Goddess of Victory had seized on his absence as a favourable opportunity to obtain the re-establishment of the proscribed cultus with full honours. There was no one now to bar the way into the palace, and any opposition Justina and her son were capable of offering, especially at this crisis when such power as they had, hung in the balance, seemed easy to circumvent either by cajolery or intimidation.

Symmachus was intrusted to draw up the petition to be sent by the discontented senators to Milan. This magistrate, it will be remembered, had succeeded his father as Prefect of Rome, and was like him a man of great personal merit.<sup>1</sup> The petition was a marvellous piece of pleading, and to this day has a classical reputation as the supreme defence of expiring paganism. He saw that in the proposed measure there must be no suggestion of a covert plan to restore the old form of worship; any hint of the kind would serve only to put the conscience of the young Christian Emperor on the alert. He prudently takes a wider, higher stand. There may, he says, be different forms of adoring the Divinity, all acceptable, but if among them one in particular be closely connected with a nation's destiny, one that memory and gratitude alike commend, should that form be chosen for proscription?

This constituted an appeal for liberty of discussion and was supported by a thrust at the persons, or rather the person who had caused the refusal of this liberty. "To be loved," said the petition, "is better

<sup>1</sup> A.D. 384.



than to command. Those whom the Senate opposes are those who set their personal reputation above the honour and interest of their Prince. . . . We ask for the restitution of a religious condition which has long been profitable to the Republic. Who is that man who is so much the friend of the barbarians that he is ready to give up the worship of Victory? We should fear all that is of ill augury. Let us pay at least to the name of Victory the homage we deny to the Divinity. So act, Princes, I conjure you, that the lessons we were taught in our childhood may be transmitted by us in our old age to our posterity. The love of habit is a great force. If this altar disappear, where shall we bind ourselves by oath to the observance of your laws? What religion will terrify the perfidious or prevent their speaking lies? Everything doubtless is full of God, and for the perjurer no place is safe. But the mere presence of a sacred object is a powerful agent in the banishment of even the thought of crime. This altar is the bond of our mutual concord, the guarantee of the fidelity of each. Nothing gives our decrees more authority than the oath we take in pronouncing them. What then? If this assembly be robbed of its sacred character and made profane, the perjurer will be able to enter."

The tone of the petition gradually rises to greater heights, and at last Rome herself is supposed to be the speaker: "Excellent Princes,"<sup>1</sup> she says, addressing the senators, "fathers of your country,

<sup>1</sup> Both Valentinian and Theodosius are addressed, for the Empire was supposed to be indivisible even where the authority ruling was divided.

have respect for the old age I have arrived at under this sacred law. Leave me my ancient solemnities, I have no cause to repent them. Leave me free to live in the manner that pleases me and in the way to which I am accustomed. This is the worship that drove Hannibal from my ramparts, the Gauls from my Capitol. Have I lived so long to come at last to this affronting change? We ask for peace for the gods of our fathers. No doubt it is just to admit that there is but one Being Whom all should worship, for all of us look upon the same stars, all are covered by one Heaven, all dwell in one world. But of what matter is the manner in which each seeks for truth? There must be more than one road to reach the great mystery of Nature."

The petition was submitted to the Consistory, and it would, no doubt, have excited a discussion, the issue of which no one could have predicted, for several members of the Council were either pagans themselves or at any rate anxious not to wound the susceptibilities of those who were. Fortunately, however, the debate was put off, and, before it took place, Ambrose had returned to Milan. No one thought it incumbent on them to tell him at once of the petition which was in fact a direct assault on himself. But he heard of it in time to write a letter to the Emperor Valentinian in which he asked, or rather demanded, that it should be shown to him immediately. His letter is severe, but the tone is that of a father admonishing a son. He reproaches Valentinian with having ever thought of treating a question in which religion was concerned without

consulting those whose province lay in such matters. "If," he says, "it were a military question you would consult those experienced in warfare. But in a question that touches religion you should think of God."<sup>1</sup> Then he expresses his astonishment that those who so long and cruelly refused liberty to Christians should now ask for liberty themselves. "Force<sup>2</sup> no one," he says, "to practise a religion they are not willing to accept; but let no one, O Emperor, deprive you of this same liberty."

His imperious tone accomplished exactly what he intended. The Council had no alternative, but in handing over the petition to the bishop they foredoomed it. He speedily composed an eloquent refutation that met the pagan orator's rhetoric at every point, and which reminds one of a mighty wind scattering barriers of sand. Symmachus himself is attacked both directly and in the historical traditions he had quoted. "If the gods protected Rome, why was their aid often long deferred? Why did they let Hannibal advance as conqueror even to the gates? Why were the Gauls actually in the Capitol, and not discovered and driven back until the goose cackled? Was it Jupiter who spoke in the cackling?<sup>3</sup> And were not the gods of the Roman generals also Hannibal's gods? Why then was one side and not the other to be victorious?"

<sup>1</sup> "Relatio Symmachi præfecti," Vol. ii., p. 868 *et seq.*—Si de re militari consulendum est debet exercitati in prælio viri expectari sententia . . . quando de religione tractatum est, Deum cogita.

<sup>2</sup> Invitum nolitis colere quod nolit: hoc idem tibi liceat Imperator.—Epist. xvii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> An in ansere Jupiter loquebatur?—Epist. xviii. 5.

Then adopting the oratorical metaphor of Symmachus, he too speaks in the name of Rome: "Rome did not tell you to say what you have said. Other is her language. Why, she asks, do you daily cover me with blood, offering many flocks in sterile sacrifice? Not in the vibrating entrails of victims is victory to be found, but in the valour of armed men. By no other science have I conquered the world. Camillus armed, drove the Gauls over the Tarpeian rock, and tore down their standards floating over the Capitol. Courage overcame those whom the gods had not repulsed. It was not at the foot of the altars of the Capitol, but in the battalions of Hannibal that the African won victory. Why do you hold my ancestors up to me? The worship Nero practised is hateful to me. I regret my errors in the past, and am not ashamed in my old age to change with the whole of a changing world. It is never too late to learn. There is no shame in passing over from one party to another that is better. Formerly I had this in common with the barbarian nations, I knew not God."

Then addressing Symmachus and his friends, he says: "Come and join us in the Heavenly army. In it we fight, in it we live. Learn the mysteries of nature from God who created nature—not from man who knows nothing about it himself. Whom should I believe about God more than God Himself? How am I to believe you, who yourself tell me you know not what you worship? You tell me there must be more than one road to the knowledge of the great mystery of nature. What you know not, God has

taught us. What you strive to discover, we, through the wisdom and truth of God, have learnt. Between our thought and yours there is, therefore, nothing in common. You ask the Emperor to give your gods peace; we ask God to give our Emperors peace." Next he alludes in a tone of raillery to the vestal virgins, Symmachus having complained in their name that they had been deprived of the revenues belonging to their altar. They went out clothed in purple and escorted by lictors, but, though there were but seven of them and their celibacy only a temporary pledge, it was very difficult to keep up their number. Finally, he closes with a fine invocation of that condition of progress which is an inherent attribute of every best thing on earth. "We are reproached," he says, "with giving up the old ways. But does not every good thing progress to something better? The very constitution of the world itself obeys this law. The earth gathered into her sphere the seeds of the elements that wandered through space a formless waste of matter, over which darkness shed horror and confusion. Afterwards Heaven and Earth divided one from the other, and took their places. Then matter clothed itself with the forms whose beauty we still admire. Next the Earth, shaking off the humid obscurity which pressed on her, was astonished to find herself lighted by the Sun. Day, when first it appears, has never the fulness of brilliancy that will follow; the light shines, the heat grows, only gradually. The Earth in the first months of the year is bare and produces nothing; but, as the season advances, she

is decked with flowers and loaded with fruit. We too, while children, are weak and imperfect, but our minds develop with the growth of our bodies. Let those, therefore, who accuse us of running after novelties, reproach the sun because he dissipated darkness; the harvest because it takes time to come; the vintage because it ripens late. Our harvest is the souls of the faithful; the fruits of grace are the Church's vintage. Since the beginning of the world there have been Saints who were the Church's blossom; but, in these later times, the Church has spread to all peoples, that it might be plainly seen that the faith of Christ has not captured ignorant souls unawares, but that upon the ruins of the opinion that once ruled the world truth has prevailed through justice."<sup>1</sup>

On the day fixed for the Emperor's decision, both the petition and Ambrose's answer were read in Valentinian's presence and under his nominal presidency. The councillors, after they had heard them, exchanged glances, but no one spoke. Ambrose's eloquence had taken effect on everyone, but some thought him too imperious. The silence was broken at last by the Emperor himself. Seized by what seemed to be a sudden inspiration, he rose and said: "I cannot undo what my brother has done. I am told my father did not take away the altar, but he was never asked to put it back. I imitate him, therefore, in changing nothing that was done before my time."

It was a Daniel, Ambrose said afterwards, speak-

<sup>1</sup> Epist. xviii. p. 20 *et seq.*

ing under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Not another word was said, and, with the tacit consent of even the pagan councillors, the Senate's petition was unanimously rejected. This success, following immediately on the important political service Ambrose had just concluded, made him a highly important personage—so important indeed that in the political circle in immediate contact with Valentinian, it soon began to be whispered that no individual, even though he were a bishop, ought to be allowed such pre-eminence. The next step was to cast about for some means to thrust him back into the rank he apparently wished to leave, and to force him to show more respect for the authority he was accused of braving. In the late encounter he had proved his strength, but the subject of contention had been Paganism, a weakened influence. But how would it be on ground where the Christians themselves were not agreed, and might be counted on to side against each other. Following up this train of argument, the Arians—who in Gratian's reign had kept in the background and become comparatively insignificant—were egged on to show a bolder front. Even earlier than this, indeed, protected by Justina and familiarly admitted to her Court, they had grown in numbers and importance. Those who followed her from Sirmium brought with them, moreover, a bishop of their own, a Goth in nationality, to whom, in memory of Ambrose's Arian predecessor in the See of Milan, they had given the name of Auxentius. One of the palace outbuildings that once had been

a stable was allotted to them for their assemblies; a place, Ambrose said afterwards, that should have suited them, for Goths had been so long accustomed to live on their chariots that to see chariots in their church ought not to have surprised them. But the stable did not long satisfy them, and, fortified by secret encouragement, they boldly petitioned the Consistory to grant them the use of a Basilica.

On this occasion the question was decided without any debate and carried by authority; for Valentinian, whose instruction in religious matters had been of a very defective kind, had not the same conscientious scruples about giving one Christian party the advantage over another that he had had when it was a question of a reactionary step in the direction of Paganism.<sup>1</sup> His mother's Arian sympathies had also naturally influenced him.

But, before the grant could be put into execution, Ambrose had to be told; for there was no possibility of excluding him from one of his churches without first giving him notice. He was therefore summoned to the palace. The Emperor was waiting for him, surrounded by his chief officers and primed with the lesson he was to repeat. In a curt tone of voice and with the fewest possible words, he told Ambrose he was to vacate the Portian Basilica. "I have no right to give the Basilica up to you," was his reply, "and you have none to take it. You do not think you have a right to lay violent hands on a private house, and yet you think you may seize the House of God." "But," said the Emperor, astonished at a

<sup>1</sup> A.D. 385. Decision of Justina in favour of Arians.



boldness to which he was little accustomed, "I too have a right to a Basilica." "No, you have no such right. Outside legitimate union with Christ there is nothing but adultery, and between you and adultery there should be nothing in common."

At this point the officers standing round the Emperor intervened, and the debate became very heated. It probably would have been prolonged had not the noise of rising tumult in the streets been heard. An excited crowd stood at the palace gates clamouring for entrance, and threatening to force their way in. A report had been circulated that Ambrose had received a mysterious command to appear before judges known to be hostile to him, and that his life was in danger. The Christians, who preponderated in the population by a large majority, were rapidly gathering about the palace; nor was their irritation allayed when they were told that it was not their bishop, but one of their churches that was threatened. An officer of the guard was sent out with orders to disperse the crowd, but they only cried: "Strike us if you like, we are ready to die for the faith of Jesus Christ."

The instability of the Imperial power, the sudden reverses to which it was at any moment exposed, had been brought forcibly home to Justina by Gratian's recent death; and, with a woman's inconsistency, she now threw herself on the protection of Ambrose, although a few moments earlier she had joined in defying him. Trembling with terror, she besought him to quiet the crowd by showing himself outside the palace. "And what

shall I tell the people?" he asked. "Tell them their Basilica shall not be taken from them." This promise from the lips of Ambrose himself and the assurance that he was safe had the desired effect and the crowd dispersed.

But the calm that followed was short-lived. Ambrose's popularity which now rose to the highest pitch, his moral power that had just been so remarkably exhibited, excited jealous resentment. No sooner was the pressing danger of the moment averted, than it was said there would have been no rising at all if Ambrose himself had not stirred it up; and that, being the author of it, there was nothing wonderful in his having calmed it so easily.<sup>1</sup> Justina, persuaded that she had played the part of dupe in a farce, planned revenge. The very next day, officers of high rank came to Ambrose, bringing him a written order to hand over, not only the Portian Basilica, which was very small, but also the one in which he himself always officiated, a newly built church, the largest in Milan and very close to his own house. "And," added the bearers of the order, "let there be no rising this time."<sup>2</sup>

Ambrose answered precisely as he had answered the Emperor, and on Palm Sunday, which fell two days after, he went as usual to the large Basilica to preside over the ceremonies of the day. The nave of the church was unusually full, and the faithful received their bishop with acclamation. He was

<sup>1</sup> Quod populus ad Palatium venisset, mihi invidia commota est.—"Sermo contra Auxentium," p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Procurarem ne quis populus turbarum moveret.—Epist. xxx. 2.

just mounting to the altar, when the Prefect of the Prætorium approached him. Fearing disturbances, he had come to ask Ambrose to consent to the cession of the smaller Basilica, promising in return to use his utmost efforts to have the requisition for the more important one withdrawn. "Ambrose," cried the congregation, suspecting the nature of this whispered conference, "Ambrose, give nothing up." The office for the day was then gone through as usual, and Ambrose gave the final instructions to the catechumens who were to receive baptism on Easter Eve.

But, beneath this exterior calm, he thoroughly realised the dangers of the crisis. Of his own duty as a priest and bishop he had not the slightest doubt; concession was impossible. But the state of public feeling was so excited, that the least spark might kindle a flame of which no one could foretell the consequences. If the people once took the law into their own hands, who could restrain them? If bloodshed followed, not only his own loyal defenders would suffer, but soldiers obeying their superiors, and inoffensive citizens suspected of belonging to the party of the Emperor. And if successful, where would the insurrection end? It might spread to all parts of the Empire ruled by Valentinian. To become in any sense the personal cause of disorder in the city where once he had been a magistrate was, moreover, very distressing to Ambrose. "While I was celebrating," he said afterwards, "news was brought me that one Catullus, who was said to be an Arian priest, had been laid hold of by the people,

They had come across him in the street. I wept bitterly, and during the holy oblation I prayed to God so to order events that not a single drop of blood should be shed in the name of the Church, but that it should rather be mine that was shed for the salvation, not only of the people, but even for those impious men themselves. I sent priests and deacons who snatched the prisoner from their violence. . . . When I heard that armed men were presently to be sent to seize the Basilica, I feared some massacre which might turn to the ruin of this city; and I prayed to God that I might not survive the ruin of such a town, ruin that might perhaps become that of the whole of Italy."<sup>1</sup>

In this anxiety he resolved that while inexorably refusing to cede any right, he would neither say nor do anything to provoke his partisans to active resistance, that all responsibility for any violence that should follow, might rest on his aggressors. He therefore carefully refrained from appearing in either of the disputed Basilicas, and officiated in one known as the Baptistery, lately erected in another quarter of the city.

The Imperial party were completely nonplussed by this prudence. They too were anxious to avoid open conflict with all its attendant risks, and hoped that Ambrose would rather yield to intimidation or commit himself by some act that would justify severely repressive measures. The doors of the Basilica were guarded by armed soldiers who were not, however, to go inside. Every effort was made

<sup>1</sup> Epist. xx.

meantime to draw Ambrose out of his reserve, and betray him into some exhibition of weakness or impatience. Now he was advised, now threatened. "Have you lost your senses," one would say, "that you dare resist the Emperor's pleasure? Do you intend to take his place and make yourself a tyrant?" The word tyrant, as need hardly be explained, had not, in Latin, the meaning applied to it in modern languages. A tyrant was one who had wrested power by force, and in this sense the word was in common use.

"What have I done that is like a tyrant?" asks Ambrose, using the word in the known sense. "When I was told the Basilica was surrounded by soldiers, I said: I cannot give it up, but I must not fight. If this is what you call tyranny, I have no other arms to use for it than the name of Christ; but, if I am trying to make myself a tyrant, why do you hesitate to strike me? The priests of the old Law sometimes conferred power on others, but they never usurped it for themselves; and as for Christ, He fled when they would have made Him King. Let the Emperor take care lest he himself create the tyrant whose opposition God has hitherto spared him.<sup>1</sup> Maximus will not tell you that I am a tyrant to Valentinian; rather ought he to complain that through my mission the road into Italy was closed to him." "But," said someone else, "promise us you will prevent any rising of the people." "I certainly can avoid exciting the people," said

<sup>1</sup> Cavere tamen ne ipse sibi tyrannum faceret cui Deus non adversarium non excitant.—Epist. xx. 22, 23.

Ambrose, "but God alone can keep them peaceable." Then he saw among his interlocutors some officers of Goth nationality, and addressing them he said: "Has Rome taken you into her service that you may bring trouble on her? Where would you go if all that is about us were destroyed?"<sup>1</sup>

All this time excitement was growing in the city, and terror reigned. The Arians were afraid to face the crowd and kept in hiding; the inferior Imperial officials, closely watched and dreading the accusation of complicity with the party of resistance, did the same. The city tradesmen, who had been at no pains to disguise their sympathies, were subjected to every sort of vexatious measure and were fined and taxed with extraordinary rigour.

"We care little," they said, "whether twice or three times as much be imposed on us, if only we be allowed to profess our faith."

Ambrose himself, the daily offices of the Church concluded, spent all his time in his own house, his door as usual open, and was prepared at any moment to be carried away and imprisoned.

Easter was at last drawing near, and it was generally felt that, in some way or other, the strain must be relaxed. Ambrose was informed that the order to occupy the large Basilica was now actually given; that the Emperor himself was coming to preside at the installation, and that the church was undergoing decoration for the event. The only notice he

<sup>1</sup> *Aderant Gothi tribuni; adoriebar eos dicens: Propterea vos possessio romana suscepit ut perturbationis publicæ vos præbeat ministros? quo transieritis si hæc deleta fuerint.*—*Epist. xx. 9.*

took of this information was to announce that no one taking part in the ceremony would be admitted to the Paschal communion. Immediately after publishing this notice he went as usual to the chapel and explained a portion of Scripture from the Book of Job, which formed part of the office for the day.

While he was speaking the clatter of arms and the steps of approaching soldiers were heard. The alarmed congregation thought that the Basilica having been seized, the bishop was now to be arrested and themselves scattered, and some of the women screamed. But, to the surprise of every one, the soldiers entered quietly and announced that they had come only to take part in the prayers.

They had, in fact, refused to obey orders. Having been told the Emperor was going to the Basilica, and that they were to attend him—"Let him come," they answered, "and if he is going to join the Catholics, we will follow him. But if not, we shall go to pray with Ambrose." Nor was this only another instance of the military disloyalty so common then in any time of disturbance. The troops were not passing from the service of one master to the other, their motive was not mercenary; they were simply upholding what they thought the cause of justice and the rights of conscience.

Their example gave the signal, and the people, not afraid now of the soldiers, streamed into the Basilica and pulling down the decorations draping the walls, threw them to the children to tear up and play with. Then arose a cry for Ambrose. Had he come, he

would have been received in triumph. The Basilica was his again, his chair waiting for him to take his place in it. But he had refused to fight, and he refused to triumph. To resist the abuse of authority was one thing, to insult its legitimate representatives another, especially in the moment of their humiliation. Nor could he afford to seem to have provoked or encouraged the breach of military discipline. Instead, therefore, of going to the Basilica, he only paused in the address he was giving, to send his priests there to restore divine worship. Then, not altering his subject, but adapting it to the changed mood of his hearers, he continued: "I came here to teach you to admire Job in his patience; but in each one of you I have found a new Job to admire. The patience of Job lives again in you all. What answer could be more worthy of Christians than the answer put upon your lips by the Holy Spirit? We do not contend with you, august Emperor, we beseech you. We do not fear you, we implore you."

He is, however, less reserved when, in direct allusion to Justina, he points out that Holy Scripture tells us more than once that the counsel of women is folly. Job in particular says "Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women." His object was, of course, to put the young Emperor on his guard against advice which had already led him into such unfortunate mistakes.

That night Ambrose did not return to his house. There was some risk of his becoming the object of a popular or military demonstration, and he thought it safer not even to pass the Basilica.



He thoroughly appreciated the value of the advantages he had gained; but on the other hand he knew the defeated party would be implacable, and that in the present state of matters it could not escape further humiliation.<sup>1</sup> The irritation in the army, a danger not to be treated lightly, entailed the removal of the guards from the church doors. This was done on Easter Day, when also all persons arrested during the disturbances were released and all the pecuniary penalties imposed on trade were remitted.

These measures caused general rejoicing, except in the palace from which they emanated; there gloom and irritation prevailed. The epithet of "tyrant" applied to Ambrose had been a great success in Imperial circles, where he was now known by no other name. The Emperor himself, in common with his party, was irritated at having had to beat a retreat, and jealous of Ambrose as a rival power. When told he ought to show himself to his troops to revive their loyalty, he answered: "Not I, there is not one of you who would not hand me over to Ambrose, bound hand and foot, if he so much as held up a finger." One of his chamberlains, the eunuch Calligone, had the insolence to say to Ambrose: "Yes, it is you who bring the Emperor into contempt. Such things shall not go on while I live. I will have your head cut off." "May God permit it!" answered Ambrose quietly. "I shall only be suffering what a bishop ought, and you doing what a eunuch ought." "This is the kind of thing

<sup>1</sup> Tyrannus appellor, et plus etiam quam tyrannus.

we have come to," he wrote to his sister Marcellina, "and would to God there were nothing more."

But a year passed, and it was not till Easter was again approaching that any fresh attack was made on the bishop. The plan this time was elaborately laid to forestall opposition. It was argued that a regulation affecting him personally, and of its very nature temporary and easily revocable, such as he had defied the year before, was nothing very formidable. But it would be another matter if he had to face a general law that left no loophole of escape and that was promulgated with all the formalities and sanctions proper to an Imperial decree. No names could appear in such a document but, in framing it, Ambrose could be kept in view. It happened, however, that Benevole, the ordinary notary of the Imperial Chancelry, on whom this task naturally devolved, was a fearless Catholic, and grasping the situation, he refused to take any part in such a composition. In vain Justina herself urged him with threats and promises to perform his duty. "Keep your honours, Empress," he replied, taking off the belt that was his sign of office, "I care for none of them if to acquire or keep them I must deny my conscience."

The Arians had an important stake in the proposed law, and to them, in default of Catholic co-operation, Justina had recourse. Ambrose tells us that it was the Arian bishop—he was a Goth, it will be remembered—who finally drew up the paper. This authorship is corroborated by internal evidence; the workmanship is clumsy, the tone one of un-

measured violence. The commonest prudence might have suggested that a sect, representing a very small minority, should be satisfied with a secondary position, or at most with equality. Even this manifestation of religious indifference Ambrose would assuredly have combated. Valentinian the First had, however, always adopted a strictly neutral attitude in religious matters, and, had the new law kept within these limits, Valentinian the Second might have adduced his father's example in his own defence. But in following in the footsteps of the Emperor Constans, he chose an unhappy precedent. The new law began by declaring with much emphasis and solemnity that full and entire liberty of assembly (*copia collegendi*) was recognised for all who professed Arianism according to the Rimini formulary. This milder form of the heresy took its name from the place where it had been drawn up under the direct control of the Emperor Constans by a certain number of bishops, who had either lost the true faith or were in a state of servile subjection to the Emperor. He was quoted in the new decree as of "holy memory" (*divæ memoriæ*), and the Rimini formulary was declared to be<sup>1</sup> "the true faith in conformity with the decrees of the whole Church which had there (*i.e.*, at Rimini) assembled, which would continue to exist until the end of time, and which had then included all who since had separated from it. As for those others (meaning the Catholics), if they still were allowed to assemble,

<sup>1</sup> A.D. 389. Edict of Valentinian II. in favour of the Arians. — "Cod. Theodos," Vol. i., L. iv., xiv.

it was only by virtue of the Emperor's good pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

The Arians had now, therefore, according to the first clause of the new law, a claim to pretty nearly every church in Milan. Their form of religion was officially stated to be the true Faith, and it was highly improbable that they would humbly accept a subordinate position and small and unimportant churches.

The struggle of the preceding year would, therefore, be renewed. Nothing could more plainly have indicated this than the concluding clauses of the decree: "As for those who think that they alone have the right to assemble, let it be known to them that should they attempt to stir up any disturbance in hindrance of the execution of these laws of Our Serenity, they will be considered seditious persons, perturbors of the Church, guilty of the crime of high treason, and shall pay the penalty of their fault with their heads. The same penalty will also be awarded to those who by their prayers, either in secret or in any private place (*obreptive vel clam*), shall oppose our injunction."

The injunction against prayer was meant for Ambrose personally, and as the president of the gatherings at which the faithful met. All the faithful came under the law; each might have feared for his own person, but every eye was turned on the bishop. What was going to happen to him? What would be done to him?

But these were questions that he never seemed to

<sup>1</sup> *Cæteris conveniendi etiam quibus jussimus placeat arbitrium.*

ask himself. "I have said," he answered, when asked what fate he expected, "what a bishop ought to say; let the Emperor do what an Emperor ought to do. Naboth would not give up the vineyard of his fathers, and is it likely I shall give up the House of my God?"

He did, in fact, refuse as absolutely after the law was published as before to withdraw his priests from any single church, and, strange to say, no force was used against him. The hand that was to have struck the blow, trembled just at the decisive moment. According to the literal text of the new decree he had incurred the penalty of death, but if any punishment at all was to be inflicted on him, it was only to be a very lenient form of exile. "Leave Milan," he was told, "go where you like, and let all who choose follow you." "I was hoping for something better, I confess," he said afterwards, "some such thing as sword or fire, and I would gladly, for the love of Christ, have exposed myself to them."<sup>1</sup>

He paid no attention to the order to leave Milan, except to remark the contrast it offered to the terms of the law on which it was based. It was a revelation of conscious weakness. Meantime he studiously avoided making any alterations in his habits. He went out at his usual hours, and even on business of no pressing necessity—sometimes to visit the tombs of the martyrs. Wherever he went, the usual crowd followed, the poor flocking about him to kiss his hand, and, thus accompanied, he passed and repassed the

<sup>1</sup> Expectabam, fateor, magnum aliquid aut gladium, pro nomine Christi aut incendium.—"Sermo contra Auxentius," 15.

palace in full view of the guard and was never molested. "The prayers of the poor protected me,"<sup>1</sup> he said.

But the faithful who loved him were not so easily reassured. His enemies might not dare to lay hands on him openly, but they were perhaps secretly plotting against him. It was reported that hired assassins were lying in wait to spring on him; then that he was to be seized and carried away in a closed vehicle expressly prepared for the purpose.

Ambrose, in accordance with his own particular desire, celebrated the Palm Sunday ceremonies in the large Basilica. But by this time the fears for his safety had risen to such a pitch, that when he tried to leave the church at the close of the ceremonies he found he was a prisoner. The faithful surrounded him, and would neither let him go nor leave themselves. The door was shut and barricaded, and the night was spent either in the body of the church or in the cloisters attached to it, where it was possible to construct a kind of camp.

There could not possibly have been any serious difficulty in forcing this improvised citadel, but this could only have been done at severe cost, accompanied perhaps by loss of life. The officers, therefore, who came from the Imperial Court with troops, thought it better only to surround the church and wait patiently for the people inside to disperse as they became either tired of self-imprisonment or unable

<sup>1</sup> Num regiam palatii eundo et redeundo? et tamen nemo me tenuit. . . . Habeo defensionem in orationibus pauperum.—  
"Sermo contra Aux.," 15.

to continue it. But they were disappointed in their calculations, for no one came out. Day followed day and still the siege continued, the faithful afraid to lose sight of their pastor lest they never should see him again. Their zeal for his safety naturally touched Ambrose, but he kept perpetually reminding them that they were troubling themselves all in vain and that everything would be as God willed. One morning, to the general dismay, one of the doors of the church was found open; a blind man who had gone out not having known how to shut it. "You see now," said Ambrose, "there is not much good in seeing clearly, for, after all, we do what the blind choose."

The difficulty was how to fill up the days and find occupation for so many people. It was useless to propose to them to leave their prison, but nevertheless they were impatient in it and found the time hang heavy on their hands. The office filled the day pretty well, but the night watches seemed interminable. So it was that it occurred to Ambrose that certain hymns of his own composition that were not incorporated in the Church's liturgy might be sung in the choir. After this, the soldiers on guard at night heard strange melodies, chants that were modulated to an unknown rhythm and seemed never to come to any end, and they wondered among themselves whether Ambrose knew the secrets of the old superstition, and used magic incantations to keep his people round him. "There was some truth in it, I do not altogether deny it," he said afterwards, attributing the effect his hymns pro-

duced to a supernatural source of inspiration. One of his contemporaries who tells us more than he does, explains that to keep his people from the weariness and melancholy of prolonged waiting he carried into effect a plan he had formed before for introducing the method of Psalmody practised in the Oriental Churches. This method was called antiphonal. The psalms were chanted by separated choirs of men and women, who answered one another in alternate verses, and it was this music, echoing in the distance, that the soldiers heard without knowing how it was produced and thought so strange.

Ambrose wrote a good many hymns. It is, therefore, not possible to say which he chose at this particular time, but it is easy to imagine that, after nights of broken sleep and anxiety, when the rays of early dawn were beginning to gild the walls of the Basilica the following hymn was sung, with emotion :—

Aurora cursus præhit  
Aurora totus prodeat  
In Patre totus Filius  
Et totus in Verbo patet.

Lætus dies hic transeat,  
Pudor sit ut diluculum,  
Fides sit ut meridies,  
Crepusculum mens nesciat.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note. —The following translation of the above hymn from the Primer of the B.V.M., London, 1780, is attributed with some reason to Dryden.

As the glad hours thus slide away,  
Let Modesty begin the day,  
And Faith be the meridian light  
Unmixt with shades of doubtful night.



On Easter Day the Holy Sacrifice was offered in the Basilica. The Festival passed, and still no one seemed inclined to take part in the assault of the sacred edifice; but this was a condition of things that could not be indefinitely continued, and the suggestion of compromise came at last from the Imperial side. The tribune Dalmatius was formally commissioned to invite Ambrose to attend a Consistory, at which he, and the so-called bishop of the Arian party, were to meet and speak in the presence of the Emperor and of arbiters to be chosen by either side. The Emperor, anxious to avoid the accusation of partisanship, would refrain from influencing the decision of the arbiters, who, he stipulated, should not be ecclesiastics. Auxentius had already chosen his.

The confession of weakness in the Imperial Council implied by the mere proposal of conditions to one guilty, under a very recently enacted law, of a capital crime, might well have inspired with courage a far less dauntless spirit than that of Ambrose. Seizing the advantages of the situation, he at once wrote the Emperor a letter of masterly logic and dignity. "Where," he asks, "have you ever heard of bishops allowing laymen to be their judges? Are laymen

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The morning lights their beams display,  
May God so rise in us to-day ;  
In God the Father all the Son,  
And He in Him entirely one.

Newman ("Verses on Various Occasions," p. 205) and Caswall ("Lyra Apostolica") have also translated the hymn. It is said in the Monday office at Lauds.

henceforth to make laws for the Church? When you are older you will see what you yourself then think of a bishop who consents to such a thing. But if Auxentius is anxious to have judges, let him come to the church and let the people judge whom they will have for their bishop. I do not envy him those who follow him." But there is an aspect of the case that touches Valentinian himself, and the practised legal mind of Ambrose does not fail to perceive this. The question at issue is the application of the late Emperor's own laws; does it befit his dignity to submit it to this kind of accidental arbitration, rather than to the Church? "Thus," he says, "it shall have been proclaimed in every province that he who disobeys a command of the Emperor shall be struck by the sword . . . and some are found who say: 'Your law has not our approval.' . . . And what you will not permit to the ministers of God you permit to laymen.<sup>1</sup> . . . Suffer me," he winds up, "not to attend your Consistory. It is a place I have only found my way to once, and then in your interest. I know not the palace secrets and I have no wish to learn them."<sup>2</sup>

While he was writing this letter his assembled people waited for him in the church, and, directly it was finished, he took his place in his Episcopal Chair and poured out the history of all he had undergone in the past year, and was still undergoing. "I

<sup>1</sup> Quis est qui possit, vel unus, vel inter paucos dicere imperatori: lex tua mihi non probatur.—Ep. xxi. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ego in consistorio nisi pro te stare non dicidi . . . palatii secreta nec novi, nec quæro.—Ep. xxi. 20.

submit to the Emperor, I do not give way to him," he repeated over and over again. Then, gathering the whole of his contention into a point, he uttered these memorable words: "The Emperor is in the Church, not over it."

It was the declaration of a new era, the voice of an authority superior to that of material force proclaiming the rights of conscience to be the axis of the moral world.

The suspense was over, the danger averted, and Ambrose saw that the Victory of the Faith now demanded a public celebration. This celebration took appropriate form in the consecration of the Basilica that had been the battle-field of the heroic struggle. A new church, it had been fitted and used for worship, but as yet had not undergone the ceremonies of consecration, and these rites require that the relics of a martyr shall rest under the altar. It was to carry out this ordinance that Ambrose, prompted by a pious tradition, instituted, under his own direct superintendence, a search for the bodies of the martyred brothers Gervasius and Protæus. The brothers were said to have suffered in the first Christian persecution, that of the reign of Nero, and to have been buried together as they died, in a certain spot which Ambrose indicated. And, in fact, in the place he pointed out two skeletons were found, locked in close embrace, and answering in every respect to the descriptions of contemporary writers, the brothers perishing by the same blow, in death itself had not been divided. The relics were carried in triumphal procession to the Basilica

with an enthusiasm that was the city's tribute to the Faith, and as may be imagined the crowd became still more enthusiastic when miraculous cures were said to have taken place on those who touched the sacred remains.

But greater are the miracles grace effects in the soul than are such miracles as these. Such was the revolution which took place in the soul of Augustine when he one day told his pupils that his classes would cease and that it was his intention to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Church. He was thirty years of age and already famous for his rare intellectual gifts. A professor of eloquence in Milan, his antecedents were well known. He was born in Africa, in which province of the Empire his father was a distinguished magistrate, but had early left his birthplace, coming first to Rome, then to Milan to pursue his studies and teach letters. Brought up in the Christian religion he was still by external profession a Christian, but he had first wandered from the paths of virtue and then indulged in dangerous metaphysical speculations. So far his history was well known; but it was less known that, captivated by the eloquence of Ambrose, he had for some time been a listener to his sermons. Nor was it known that the bishop, although cognizant of the young man's errors, was in the habit of receiving him on terms of intimacy, held discussions with him, and if he did not convince him, met his objections and answered his difficulties by referring him to appropriate passages of Scripture.

The hidden travail of the young man's soul was

his own secret and only a few were aware that his mother, a devout widow, had left home and country in her declining years to come and try to reclaim the son she loved from error and the slavery of his passions. Monica had been in the besieged Basilica "living," Augustine tells us, "on prayer." During these days so fruitful in blessing "taking her part in vigil and anguish," she prayed not only for Ambrose, but also for Augustine we may be sure, and, in this connection, the famous conversion that gave Augustine to the Church especially belongs to this period of our history.

"I have found my way only once to your Consistory and then in your interest," Ambrose had told Valentinian. He probably little thought, when he adopted this lofty tone, that in a very short time he would be there again, and for the same reason as before. But so it was; and had he been actuated, as was supposed, by feelings of vulgar ambition or revenge, he must have been eminently satisfied.

Reports of the commotions in Milan had reached Maximus in Trêves. As the acknowledged successor of the unfortunate Gratian, undisturbed in his authority so far as it extended, he studiously cultivated the goodwill of the Christian public—the bishops of Gaul and Spain, who had great authority with their people (and for the most part deservedly), he tried especially to win.

The task he had imposed on himself was less difficult in the absence of Arianism, the heresy having taken practically no root in the provinces he seized.

The part of Protector of the Catholics gave him a

gratifying importance and brought him into good odour with his subjects. But it did more than this. He had accepted only as a temporary expedient the frontier limits imposed on him, and by pursuing a policy that ingratiated him with a large section of Valentinian's subjects he hoped to smooth the way for future extension.

The Milan disturbances provided him with an opportunity of which he took advantage to write a letter of fatherly advice to his youthful colleague. "What is this I hear?" he wrote to the Emperor at Milan. "I am obliged to believe it, for rumour is rarely deceived in matters that concern the populace. It is said that in consequence of new edicts of Your Clemency, Catholic sanctuaries are violated, priests besieged in their churches, fines inflicted on them; they are threatened with capital punishment, and in the name of I know not whose law (*nescio cujus legis*), it is the most holy law of God that is attacked."

After this follows a vivid picture, probably drawn by some ecclesiastic about his court, of the miseries resulting from Arianism, and an exhortation to remain in communion with the See of Rome, "*the most venerable of all*," and also with the Churches of Africa and of all the provinces of which Valentinian is Emperor. He draws up a list of these provinces with a kind of pious envy, but takes care to disclaim any interested intentions. "What more," he writes, "could one who was your enemy desire than that you should attack the Church, and in so doing, God Himself? But such is my affection for your youth, that I rejoice

when you do well and mourn when you do wrong. The responsibility you are incurring frightens me for your sake. I warn you as an enemy would not do."

But the letter contained something besides pious counsels. Maximus sharply complained that the border line was not properly respected, and that Count Bauton (who had accompanied Ambrose to Trêves), instead of defending it as it was his business to do, thought nothing of driving the barbarians over his own frontier into the neighbouring provinces. Maximus also accused him of keeping on friendly terms with certain German tribes for the sake of getting recruits for his legions, without reflecting that, protected by this alliance, the tribes were the more easily able to harass and invade other parts of the Empire.

On the face of things it was no doubt natural to summon Ambrose to attend the Council at which these grievances were discussed. He had taken so large a part in drawing up the conditions between the two Emperors that he was the most suitable person to consult now. There must indeed have been some reluctance on Justina's part to let him into the secret of the interference of Maximus on behalf of the Catholics, and she consented probably only in hopes of discovering whether there was any secret intelligence between the would be Protector and Valentinian's injured Catholic subjects. If, however, she really was uneasy on this score, her anxiety was soon dispelled. Ambrose knew enough of Maximus to see through his hypocrisy and under-

stand his veiled threat. Intrigue of any kind was repugnant to his nature<sup>1</sup> and he was besides sincerely attached to the Emperor. He was young, and touchingly candid, and Ambrose loved him personally as well as for the sake of his father and brother. More than once in the exercise of his sacred duties he had indeed been brought into collision with his authority, but he regarded it with undiminished respect and the tone of contemptuous superiority adopted by the Emperor Maximus was exceedingly distasteful to him. Such were the statements, convincing in their evident sincerity, that Ambrose made before the Council.

The crisis admitted of no delay, the covert threat contained in the letter demanded immediate attention. Ambrose had succeeded before in exacting respect from Maximus and in keeping him at bay; there was no time for choice, Ambrose was the best person to send to him again, and this strange and unlooked for mission, which made the culprit and rebel of yesterday the Imperial Ambassador of to-day, Ambrose accepted.<sup>2</sup>

The covert threats in the letter had excited fears which it would have been impolitic to reveal prematurely to Maximus. To avoid this it became necessary to invent some pretext for the expedition that would sufficiently account for the dignity of the ambassador. This pretext was furnished by Gratian's remains. In the troubled days of victorious insurrection, no one had thought of giving them proper funeral honours, and to claim the body in order to

<sup>1</sup> Ep. xxiv., p. 885, Vol. i.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. 387.



supply this omission gave the embassy of Ambrose an ostensible purpose that need in no wise have excited the susceptibilities of Maximus, since he had always affirmed that not only had he had no hand in the murder, but that it had been committed without orders from him and without his knowledge. But it was a foregone conclusion, nevertheless, that Maximus would resent the request.

There was little in common between the present mission and the former one. In the former mission it had been absolutely essential to practise the utmost patience and circumspection to avoid, as much as possible, debates that never seemed to lead to anything. But now the position was different. After three peaceful years, Valentinian stood on firmer ground than at the time of Gratian's death. His authority had indeed suffered some detriment in his conflicts with the Church, but here Ambrose knew his own strength, and he at least had nothing to fear. The transformation, therefore, under which he reappeared in the Court at Trêves was premeditated. An Emperor's envoy, a bishop, he exacted full recognition of his rank in both capacities. He was bold, vigorous, fearless in opening discussion, invulnerable to all exhibitions of hostile sentiment.

The tone of the letter of Maximus was tantamount to a declaration of his intention to take the offensive, and the only way to prevent his carrying his scheme into execution was to intimidate him.

Ambrose had soon an opportunity of showing the line he meant to take. The Priscillianists, a small

sect called after their founder (a Spanish bishop), were summoned before the Emperor's tribunal. The doctrines of the sect appear to have been false in philosophy rather than in theology, but are difficult now to trace. At Trêves, however, the mere suspicion of unorthodoxy was a crime. The contrast in this respect between his own Court and that of Milan, where heresy was openly harboured, was a matter of self-congratulation to Maximus; and, with an eye to the future, he perhaps watched to see the effect it would have on Ambrose.

But the excess of zeal into which his palpable insincerity betrayed him had by no means the effect he intended. That a dispute in dogma should be dealt with as a crime, shocked the consciences of all right-minded Catholics, and they were outraged still more when capital sentence was passed and ruthlessly executed. That blood should again be shed in the name of religion, was too like a revival of the times of persecution not to cause alarm. The trial had, besides, been so conducted, that the bishops called to give judgment on the disputed doctrines seemed accessory to the iniquitous sentence. And so afraid were these bishops of giving offence to the Emperor that they took very little pains to disavow the scandalous charge; thus tacitly admitting that the ministers of Jesus Christ had pronounced sentence of death.

An accidental circumstance heightened the effect of the scandal. St Martin of Tours, the ornament of the Church in Gaul, who had spent his life in evangelising the people and effacing the lingering

traces of the old heathen worship, was in Trêves on business when the cruel sentence was passed. He made the only protest in his power. He abruptly left Trêves avowedly to avoid communion with the bishops, who from worldly motives had so gravely compromised the sacred dignity of their character.

These events were still the general topic of conversation when Ambrose arrived, and everyone was anxious to know what course he would take. Would he be less scrupulous, less courageous than Martin; would he touch the blood-stained hands of the courtier-bishops when they were extended to him? If diplomacy had been his first consideration, had it been his chief care to secure a favourable reception for the cause he came to plead, he could easily have escaped making any immediate stand. But he was a bishop first, a diplomatist afterwards, and he lost no time in making manifest his determination to hold no intercourse with the prelates who cared rather to continue in the Emperor's good graces than to observe the usages and fulfil the duties of their sacred office. He took this position, his eyes fully open to the fact that to refuse communion with them would exclude him from communion with Maximus; for it was through their ministrations only that the Emperor participated in the ceremonies of the Church. But his opinion was fixed, had more than once been formally expressed, and he saw no reason to retract it; a priest should neither demand the death of an enemy of the Faith nor of any other man. To act otherwise was to be like those Jewish doctors who

tried to force Christ to agree that the woman taken in adultery was worthy of death.

After this prelude Ambrose can hardly have been surprised at the reception that awaited him at Court. But his own account of his first interview with the Emperor is too interesting not to be given in full.

"The day after I arrived I went to the palace. The Chamberlain Gallenus, a royal eunuch, advanced towards me. I asked to be received. He wished first to know if I brought any written form from Your Clemency. I answered that such was the case. Then he informed me I could be received only in Consistory. I replied that bishops were not accustomed to be so received, and that there were several matters I wished to speak of to the Emperor apart. He then left me to consult the Emperor, but came back bearing the same message, so that I saw the first had also been given by order. 'This is contrary to the rules of my charge,' I replied, 'but I am unwilling to fail in the fulfilment of the duty laid on me; and, as we have to deal with an affair between brothers, simplicity will not be amiss.' I then entered the Consistory, and I saw him rise and come forward to give me the kiss of peace. But I stood still, not moving at all. He called me, and others also told me to mount where he was. 'Why,' I asked him, 'do you want to kiss me whom you do not know? If you did know me you would not receive me here.' 'Bishop! you are displeased.' 'And not without reason. I am in confusion, being received here, a place in which I ought not to be.'

‘But when you were here before you came to the Consistory.’ ‘I came then to the Consistory on purpose because I came in the name of a suppliant to sue for peace; but to-day I come in the name of an equal.’ ‘An equal! to whom does Valentinian owe it that he is equal to me?’ ‘To God Almighty he owes it; for He has preserved for him the power He gave him.’”

There was a meaning under this pious form of speech which Maximus would understand. He liked to think that Valentinian only reigned thanks to his forbearance at the time of Gratian’s death. He had allowed himself then, he thought, to be beguiled by Ambrose’s fair words and promises into sparing Valentinian. “‘Yes, you tricked me,’ he cried, rising angrily from his seat, ‘you and that Bauton who is trying to reign himself now under cover of that boy’s name, and who keeps sending the barbarians to me. If I had not stopped of my own accord when you came, what was there to stand in my way?’ To this I replied quietly, ‘Do not give way to this emotion for which there is no cause. Listen calmly to what I have to say. If I have come back, it is just because I knew you complained of having been deceived because you trusted in me. If I had indeed been the saviour of the young prince I should think it a great honour to me, for to whom more than to orphans do we bishops owe protection? Is it not written: you are the defender of the widow and should be a father to the orphan.

“‘But no such service have I rendered Valentinian. How could I have stopped your legions and prevented

their entering Italy? With what barriers? what rocks? what troops? <sup>1</sup> Did my body close to you the passage of the Alps? Would to God I had done it; I certainly should not try to excuse myself if I had. Tell me what were the promises I made you to induce you to decide on peace? And Bauton, in what has he deceived you? Is it because he is devoted to his Prince? And when did he promise you he would betray him? ”

Then going into the grievances complained of by Maximus, he showed him that his wrongs were only imaginary, the measures he objected to having been taken in self defence or as reprisals. Then, still carrying the war into the enemy's quarters, he plunged into the ostensible motive of his journey. It had not served as a pretext, for before he arrived he knew Maximus had already given out that he would not allow the remains of the murdered Emperor to be touched for fear of stirring up dangerous memories among his soldiers. “How vain is such an excuse,” he said, “is it likely that him, whom alive the soldiers deserted, they will defend now he is dead? Will you tell me that Gratian was your enemy and that you would have had a right to kill him? It was not he who was your enemy, it was you who were his. For if I mistake not, he is the enemy who wishes to take the Empire and declares war; he who is in possession only defends himself. Give Valentinian his brother's remains as a pledge of peace; for how can you suppose he will believe that it was not you

<sup>1</sup> Quibus rupibus, quâ acie, quibus numeris? An corpore meo tibi clausi Alpes?—Epist. xxiv. 6.

who caused him to be killed, if you will not permit his burial?"

Maximus, much displeased, cut short the interview, saying he would see what he would do. Next day he sent Ambrose an order to leave Trêves, which indeed was only what might have been expected. Ambrose did not wait for it to be repeated. He left in broad day and by the usual road, although warned he might expect ambushes. His only companion was an old bishop, one who had shared the weakness of his brethren, but now penitent, wished not to be left among them. Old as he was, he was pitilessly treated, and Ambrose could neither get him warm garments to travel in nor a cushion to put into the chariot to save him a little on the rough roads.

As hostile criticism was sure to distort all that had taken place when the story became public property, Ambrose sent his own account to Valentinian by a courier who would reach Milan earlier than he could himself. He went into minute detail and ended with these words: "Hail, Emperor! beware of him who speaks peace with his neighbour and has war in his heart."

He had but anticipated what really happened. No sooner was the news spread, than there was a cry around Justina that the embassy had failed on account of the haughtiness of the ambassador. In dealing with a dangerous and easily exasperated rival, he had behaved just as he always did in Milan. There was only one way to repair the harm done; another ambassador must be sent off at once; this time not an overbearing priest, accustomed to

rule the Faithful with dogmatic authority, but a courtier, a practical business man. Domnin was chosen, a man of Syrian birth, and supposed to possess Oriental cunning and suppleness of character. But only time was needed to show the mistake of this choice.

At first everything went smoothly. In writing to Milan, Domnin betrays an almost puerile surprise at his reception. The Emperor is so gracious, almost affectionate, in his manner; he accepts every excuse and explanation without cavil; appears almost to forget he ever had any grievances, and every disputed point seems in a fair way to be amicably settled.

But it scarcely required the astuteness of a Domnin to suspect some hidden motive for this sudden change of front. In point of fact, the boldness of Ambrose had greatly perplexed Maximus. His was the tone of real or imaginary strength, not of weakness. If Valentinian were surrounded by men of this calibre, and if he relied on them, he was not the forlorn, helpless orphan he was represented, frightened at every threat, and easily duped. Other considerations also, according to a pagan writer, weighed with Maximus. The road into Italy was beset with difficulties for an army, the mountains inaccessible, the lakes and marshes formidable. It was no light matter, under the circumstances, to throw down the gauntlet to an enemy likely to take it up with such courage.

But he felt his feet on firmer ground again when the new envoy came. His tone was so propitiatory,



such a contradiction of that of his predecessor, that there was evidently nothing substantial behind the bold words of Ambrose. It would simply be a case of waiting for the opportune moment that the more astute party may generally seize in a dispute; the moment when an advance on one side must cause a corresponding retreat on the other.

The kindness shown him had so affected Domnin and his response was so touchingly ingenuous that Maximus, cunning as well as ambitious, saw advantages within his grasp that he had never dreamed of before. With Domnin as negotiator it might be possible to open a road into Italy without recourse to forcible measures.

The ambassador was on the point of leaving when Maximus sent for him to come and see him once more; and at this interview, an informal one, he announced himself willing to help Valentinian against the Barbarians, especially in Pannonia, which at the moment was threatened. Although this was not one of the provinces that had submitted to his rule, he and Valentinian, animated by a common spirit of patriotism, would sink their personal rivalries in the public interest.

He set the example by spontaneously offering some of his picked legions to Domnin, under whose leadership he proposed their joining Valentinian's army which could then strike a decisive blow at the hereditary enemy.

It is just possible to believe that, flattered by the important part assigned to him, Domnin was really blinded to the true nature of these proposals. But,

coming from such a source, and obviously suggestive of the continual passage of troops and military stores across the Alps, it is less easy to understand that Justina and her advisers did not see through the somewhat clumsily laid snare. Failing a better solution of this enigma, we may suppose that, only less cunning than their adversary, they calculated on not having to give back the legions once they got them into their hands, and perhaps on bribing them eventually to turn against the dreaded power of Maximus himself. But however this was, the proposal was agreed to, and Domnin came back to Italy leading the borrowed legions past garrisons and through fortified passes, that could easily have resisted a far superior force.

But directly Maximus knew that this had been done, he started on the same march himself with all the troops at his disposal, giving no time to the governors and inhabitants of the places that lay on his way, to collect their wits and rally to one side or the other. Twenty miles from Milan he caught up Domnin, and, not deigning to forewarn him of his intention to lead his own troops into Milan, wrested from him the command it had suited him to lend him for a little while. What this meant no one for a moment doubted.

A general panic in court and city followed. Each thought only of his own safety; no one of the resistance which had now indeed become impossible. Deserted by every one, Justina and her advisers lost their heads, and a general stampede took place; Empress, Emperor, magistrates (among these even

Probus, the friend and former patron of Ambrose) fled to Aquileia. But here, in a few days, Justina felt neither she nor her children were safe, and, embarking with them at a small port in Dalmatia, she doubled Cape Matapan and made for Thessalonica to place herself under the protection of Theodosius.

Italy was now at the mercy of the invader, and only Ambrose, who so lately had provoked his resentment, waited calmly for him in Milan.

## CHAPTER III

### AMBROSE AND THEODOSIUS

**D**IRECTLY Justina reached Thessalonica, she sent a humble message to Theodosius, imploring his protection for her son ; and this confidence the Emperor was both able and willing to justify.

The eight years that had elapsed since Gratian associated him to the Imperial dignity, had been profitably spent in recovering a firmer foothold for the Eastern Empire, imperilled under the weak and despotic rule of Valens.

The contrast Theodosius offered to his predecessor was complete at every point. Though he had unwillingly accepted power, and was not one of those rare geniuses who periodically illuminate the pages of history, he had, nevertheless, valuable governing qualifications. He was honest, he had strong common sense and an iron will. Sincere in his desire to do right, when once he thought he saw where duty led, he set to work with a moderation and persistency rarely found in combination, to surmount every obstacle.

By steadily following an undeviating line of policy, he had gradually retrieved the disaster at Adrianople, treating separately with each tribe and absorbing them one by one into orderly conditions under

Roman administration. Much that had been swept away in the invasion had also to be restored.

But to appease the religious dissensions that Valeus had so injudiciously fomented, was at least no easier task—one that required infinitely delicate handling. Theodosius was a loyal Catholic, and the immediate effect of his accession was relief to the harassed adherents of the Nicene creed. But in long persecutions, the persecuted, closely united at first in a common purpose of resistance, have not infrequently disagreed among themselves at last—the stress of circumstances forcing into accidental contact jarring elements of character and unequal intelligences. This had unfortunately happened in the East. The Bishops who met at the invitation of Theodosius, in the Council of Constantinople, differed so acutely among themselves, that more than once the situation was saved only by the Emperor's intervention. But his advice prevailed, and at last the Council was able to promulgate its very important decrees. They were received with an outburst of popular enthusiasm that was not only the pious recognition of their value to the Church, but a tribute to the Emperor's ability in the art of governing men.

Just before this he had won great applause by an exhibition of clemency. Owing to the levying of unusually heavy taxes to meet certain charges on the Treasury, serious riots had taken place in Antioch, the brilliant capital of Asia Minor. The mob, having personally insulted the Emperor and his family, repressive measures had naturally fol-

lowed, the principal agitators being sentenced to death. But at the prayer of Bishop Flavian, Theodosius had first delayed the execution, then granted a free pardon couched in particularly gracious language. It is interesting to remark that on both these occasions, it is as the loyal son of the Church, actuated by his faith, that the pious feeling of the age applauds the Emperor.

Justina came at the right moment to find Theodosius at leisure and ready to attend to her. Her story caused him no surprise. He had never trusted Maximus, whom, indeed, if his future could have been forecast by his past, there was little enough ground to trust. At the time of the military revolt to which he owed his election, and again when Gratian was murdered, Theodosius would have marched into Gaul against him, had not his presence in the East then been of urgent necessity. He had hesitated, besides, to march an army through Italy until authorised to do so by an appeal for help. He had recognised Maximus at last, but not willingly, and he was now resolved that he should never push his frontier to the limits of the Eastern Empire; not only because he objected to him as a neighbour, but because he still was loyal to Gratian's memory. It was indeed for Gratian's sake that he felt himself morally bound to defend his brother.

When, therefore, Justina's arrival was announced, he gave orders that she was to be treated with Imperial honours, and he went in person with some of the chief members of his Council, to pay her his respects. When Valentinian was presented to him,

he took him into his arms, and, embracing him with a father's affection, said: "My child, let this misfortune teach you a lesson. Understand that the only solid foundation for power is justice—not arms. Believe me who speak out of my experience. By piety, Emperors have been able to maintain discipline in their armies, conquer their enemies, subjugate them to their laws, and to overcome all their trials. Such were the fortunes of the great Constantine and of your own father. Your uncle Valens, on the contrary, because he troubled the Church, putting to death and banishing Saints and Bishops, was abandoned to the threatening multitude of the Barbarians and his remains were consumed in the flames. It is said, that he who drove you out of Milan offers a truer worship to Christ than you do—his strength therefore lies in your unfaithfulness. For if we adore not the name of Christ, what other name shall we invoke in our battles?"

Adversity is a good school, and Valentinian, now in his fifteenth year, understood the lesson conveyed in these words. Returning the Emperor's affectionate embrace, he vowed that he would never again forsake the law of Christ. "Thus," said Ambrose afterwards to Theodosius, "it was not the Empire Your Clemency gave back to him, but himself that you have given back to the Faith."

It was a crisis demanding the Emperor's intervention on both religious and political grounds. It was a duty to befriend a Prince who was the victim of treason; an act of policy to make an example of the traitors that would have a deterring effect on

others who might be inclined to follow their example. He began with a step that made it clear that he intended to adopt the young Emperor's cause as his own. He had only just become a widower after many years of happy married life ; had been devoted to his wife, was a man of restrained habits, and no one had thought of his re-marrying. But to the general surprise it was announced that he intended to contract an alliance with Galla, one of Justina's daughters, who had shared her mother's flight from Milan.

Even before the declaration of war, Maximus must have understood this significant step. He would now have to face all the forces of the East, under a general whose fortunes had hitherto been one unvaried success. At the same time his reception in Milan, and all parts of Italy, was more than disquieting. The first alarm of his sudden invasion had been succeeded by a kind of dull stupor. No active resistance was made to what seemed an accomplished fact ; but there was none of the joyful demonstration he had expected from the Catholic party whom he had come to release from Justina's vexatious rule. Ambrose had his own excellent reasons for keeping aloof from him, and the Faithful followed the example of their Bishop. This, indeed, was only what might have been expected after recent events. Not having conciliated Ambrose, the invader tried to make a friend of Pope Siricius who occupied the Roman See, as successor to Damasus. He wrote to him of his submissive sentiments and proclaimed his own honourable services in having



prevented the development of plots against the Church, "the evil effects of which would," he wrote, "have been irremediable." No reply from the Pope has been preserved, whom it is very likely Ambrose had put on his guard. There did, indeed, come a message from Rome, but one of a very different character. Symmachus arrived in Milan at the head of a deputation from the Senate, bringing one of the panegyrics which were drawn up in honour of every new Sovereign. But these advances from the declining party were only an embarrassment. To pass over to another party would have been a difficult task, and one attended with many disadvantages. To give unnecessary offence in any quarter would, however, be a mistake, and by way of a propitiatory measure Maximus chose from the Prætorium a prefect, on whom he laid only one charge. Every form of worship was to enjoy equal liberty. To fulfil this injunction, the Prefect began by rebuilding a synagogue, said to have been burnt by the Christians in some popular commotion. The incident attracted a good deal of notice, and, as we shall see, Ambrose remembered, and subsequently made use of, it, but it had not the effect of drawing him or the Catholics who took their cue from him, out of their reserve.

But Theodosius did not grant Maximus a moment's longer respite than he could help. With his accustomed energy, his plans were no sooner formed than put into execution. In less than two months he was on the borders of Pannonia. Here he met the opposing army, but Maximus had not ventured to take the command in person. Two battles followed

in both of which Theodosius was victorious. That of the second day hardly deserved indeed to be called a battle. At the first onslaught it was evident that defection reigned in the army of Maximus; his troops had plainly no intention of sharing his evil fortunes, and defeat was quickly followed by complete rout.

It was the soldiers of the defeated Emperor's own guard who undertook his arrest. First they despoiled him of his diadem and purple robes, and then, binding him hand and foot, they dragged him to the conqueror's tent. It would have been more agreeable to the feelings of Theodosius to spare his life; if from no other motive, in order to avoid an exhibition of vengeance in the presence of the youthful Emperor Valentinian. But this did not meet the views of the traitor soldiers. His death was the only way to make sure against retribution, for none could tell what the next turn of the wheel of fortune might evolve.

After the execution of Maximus, Theodosius started to march rapidly on Milan. Valentinian was still with him, for he was anxious that he should share the triumphal reception that Milan was preparing for the conqueror; it might otherwise have seemed as if he looked for some personal advantage from his late successes. That nothing of this kind entered into his calculations, was afterwards proved by his immediately proclaiming that there would be no repartition of the Empire on any new basis. Valentinian was to govern, not only the provinces he had lost, but those that Maximus had seized at the death of Gratian. Theodosius himself acquired no increase

of territory by his victories, and kept strictly within the limits assigned to him originally by Gratian.

But his disinterestedness, though no doubt absolutely sincere, deceived no one as to the future. The Empire might have two Emperors but had henceforth but one master. Valentinian reigned only by the grace of his colleague, and his every act would be performed under the direction of a superior. Nor does the young Emperor seem to have resented this position. Justina, who might have fomented differences between the Emperors, vanishes from the scene at this point of her son's history. It is, however, not known whether by death, or simply because she had the common sense to keep in the background.

All eyes were now fixed on two figures that stood face to face in the capital of the Western Empire, and these were Ambrose and Theodosius. Their first interview must have been a remarkable one; and it is to be regretted that Ambrose, whose correspondence is so rich in historical details, has omitted all mention of it. It is, however, at least certain, that mutual confidence sprang up between them almost at once. Their views perfectly harmonised on all matters which they had to treat in common. The union of the Church and Empire was the definite aim of both; this union was to both the only solid basis on which to build up the political and social system, as it would now be called, which both desired. Theodosius was convinced that the Empire would prosper only by absolute respect for the Church of Christ.

Ambrose, that to support the authority of the laws of the Church, was the best means to ensure the welfare of the Empire. These propositions, of their very nature, could never contradict one another, and established an identity of interest. The touching terms of intercourse that had existed between Gratian and Ambrose were of course not revived. Theodosius, an experienced man, in full possession of his matured faculties, neither needed, nor probably would have accepted, the protecting care and guidance formerly bestowed on Gratian's youth and inexperience. But Ambrose did not attempt to force any such terms on him. He had exceeded the strict limits of his episcopal attributes, only in response to urgent appeal or entreaty. We do not therefore find any trace of his having undertaken or sought any confidential mission such as Justina, in moments of imminent peril, had reluctantly enough imposed upon his unwilling acceptance. The friendship between Bishop and Emperor, men worthy of each other, and both worthy of their respective positions, was loyal, manly, and founded on the ground of mutual esteem and sympathy. This friendship, more than once put to the test, withstood, as we shall see, the sharpest trials. On some rare occasions, Ambrose threw aside his reserve, and stood forth to protect, either some right appertaining to his office, or some one of the great moral laws which God has put under the sanction of the Church, and of which He has made her the Guardian. At these times he certainly waited for no one to ask his advice. He spoke in a voice that penetrated the conscience of the Emperor,

surrounded by a servile crowd of flatterers. But fearlessly as he spoke, his words were always uttered in a tone of affection that robbed them of offence.

Soon it became apparent, that if he kept aloof from political business, now that the government was in competent hands, he had the more strength in reserve when defending interests strictly within his own province. He was first called out of this reserve by a recrudescence of the old dispute with the Senate, which may indeed have been revived partly to test the limits of his power over Theodosius. The Senate had very lately congratulated Maximus on the downfall of Valentinian's authority; now Theodosius had to be congratulated on its restoration. The usual deputation arrived, and the usual panegyric was spoken, this time perhaps less unmeaningly than had often been the case. Some attempt had been made to veil the uncomfortable associations connected with the preceding deputation, by bringing prominently forward an invitation to the Conqueror to honour the Eternal City by graciously visiting it. The compliment expressed a sincere wish. Rome had been deserted for Constantinople since the latter city came into existence. With one single exception, it was thirty years since the people of Rome had seen an Emperor, and that exception, a flying visit paid by Constans (the son of Constantine), had left scarcely a trace behind. But this long deprivation would only add to the value of the visit now suggested; and the victor who had just triumphed in two battles, might count on a reception worthy of him, one that should fall short in nothing,

of the triumphs of the palmiest days of ancient Rome.

Theodosius was not a man to be affected by any love of show or vain pomp; but he saw the importance attaching to this proposal. Rome was the heart of the Empire, the spot in which all the great memories of the past found a common centre, and a formal reception there would stamp his authority with an indelible character. But he either did not notice, or did not understand, the embarrassed phrases in which the spokesman of the deputation hinted that the day of a victorious Emperor's triumphant reception would be a fit occasion to render once again to the Goddess of Victory, the homage of which she had been deprived. To this suggestion the Emperor made no reply, but the deputies retired more than satisfied with silence, where an open rebuff had been dreaded.

The deputation from the first had excited the suspicions of Ambrose, and when this oration was reported to him, he went straight to the Emperor to put him on his guard. "I stood before him and did not hesitate to throw it in his face,"<sup>1</sup> he tells us. Theodosius, taken aback, could not, it seems, make up his mind then and there to bind himself to any definite answer, and the Bishop did not come back to the Palace again for several days. This absence was remarked and understood, and had the intended effect. The deputation returned to the Senate without eliciting one word from the Emperor that could be construed into the promise

<sup>1</sup> *Coram intimavi, et in os dicere non dubitavi.* Epist. lvii. 4.

that the votaries of the Goddess desired to win from him. But "he was not displeased with me," Ambrose tells us, "because it was not for my own interest but for the good of my soul and his that I spoke before kings and was not ashamed."<sup>1</sup> Theodosius perhaps also saw that Ambrose had, in reality, put him on his guard against an act of weakness which might seriously have compromised the character of his intended visit. The stand he took, produced, on the contrary, an effect that must have been very agreeable to his adviser. In Rome the friends of Ambrose gathered round the Emperor in unlooked-for numbers. "The faith," says a Christian poet of the time, "never before gained so many neophytes, especially among the conscript fathers, as in those days of festivity and glory,<sup>2</sup> in which it seemed new homage came to restore youth to the republic in her old age."

But while Theodosius was busy in the West, not in the enjoyment of mere empty triumph, but in solid labour, trouble was brewing in the East, where his strong hand was wanting. It was a sign of the decomposition that had already set in, that no part of the Empire could dispense with the Emperor's personal action. Very soon after Theodosius left Constantinople, it was rumoured that his army had received a check. Emboldened by this report, the

<sup>1</sup> Non moleste tulit quia non pro meis commoditatibus, sed quod ipsi et animæ proderat, in conspectu regis loqui non confundebar.

<sup>2</sup> Ne Romula virtus

Non sit anus, norit nec gloria parta senectam

(Prud. contra Symmachum, v. 510 *et seq.*)

Arian population attacked the Catholics and set fire to the house of Nectarius, Bishop of the city, whom Theodosius was known greatly to respect. A more correct report immediately succeeding the first, the Catholics now turned on the Arians, and their retaliation, it must be allowed, was unmeasured. These disorders were followed by similar scenes in other regions, in particular in the province of Osroene, on the banks of the Euphrates, at the foot of Mount Taurus, where the fanatical zeal of certain monks led to very regrettable excesses. Jews, and small heretical bodies, were treated with like ruthlessness, and without the excuse of any provocation. In quick succession and from various points at the same time, news of these events reached Theodosius. Highly incensed that the peace built up by the patient labour of years, here by repressive measures, there by such others as the case seemed to demand, should be thus disturbed by a handful of agitators, he would have dealt the same punishment to all without distinction. But his son Arcadius, a mere youth whom he had raised to the rank of an Augustus, and left to represent him in the East, pleaded for the Arians, that they repented ; and also that he himself shrank from inaugurating his reign by severity. Theodosius was an affectionate father, and he yielded to this not unreasonable appeal. But the Catholics, who had still more provoked him, yet remained to be dealt with. He had done so much for them, protecting them by special edicts, and treating them with peculiar kindness, that they had no shadow of excuse for infringing the laws of a legal system, the



whole tenour of which was in their favour. There was even a kind of ingratitude in doing so that was a very disappointing return for his benefits. Nor was it merely a few fanatical monks of whom he had to complain. He was told the Bishop of Callinicum, the capital of Osroene, was charged with having excited and encouraged the monks, and the importance of this personage lent additional gravity to his offence. Theodosius did not wait even to enquire into the truth of this accusation. When asked how the Bishop was to be dealt with, he simply answered: "You know the law; apply it, no matter what the consequences." The Bishop was sentenced to rebuild, at his own cost, all the buildings destroyed in the outbreak, among them a Jewish synagogue.

Ambrose was absent from Milan at the time all this happened, and as he was not directly concerned no steps were taken to give him immediate information. But when the news did at last reach him he was sufficiently disturbed to write at once to Theodosius on the subject. He was at Aquileia at the time. Several points in the Emperor's hasty decision were open to criticism. In the first place, it was by no means sure that the Bishop had really acted in the manner reported. He was punished without being heard, without being given the chance to defend himself. Nor did it seem fair that great clemency should be shown in Constantinople, in the most public manner, towards heretics who acknowledged themselves guilty, and in a remote diocese, such very different measure meted to the Faithful,

although their guilt had not been proved. In any case, could not some less unsuitable method of compensation be discovered than that of forcing the chief Pastor of a Christian Church to humble himself publicly to the descendants of the murderers of Christ?

If Ambrose had based his representations on such grounds as these, a man of the Emperor's character must have recognised the propriety and justice of his case. But it cannot be denied that, in his letter, he took a very different tone. It is perhaps, the only one of his writings in which we do not find that measure and exactitude of expression he has accustomed us to expect from his eloquent pen. He does not plead for the particular Bishop in question, nor for further enquiry into his case; still less that he may be pardoned. He simply makes a formal protest based on an absolute principle. A Bishop, under no circumstances whatever, and for no cause whatever, can be obliged to contribute to the construction of any edifice in which the Christian Faith may be either attacked or misrepresented. To do so would be an act of sacrilege on the part of the Bishop, since he would indirectly be helping to teach erroneous doctrine. To attempt to force a Bishop to build such an edifice, would be to force him to choose between cowardly submission and a resistance, that if necessary, he should push even to the shedding of his blood. Ambrose extends his case beyond the incident of the moment, to embrace all cases of the same nature in all ages. His logic errs, however, by excess; the Church, in her maternal wisdom,

under the same circumstances, having more than once relaxed the strict letter of the law.

But setting aside this excess, the protest is in itself an admirable piece of workmanship. His task, the difficult one of inducing his sovereign to acknowledge that he has made a mistake, is very skilfully done, a touch of pathos here and there relieving the composition. With mingled dignity and respectful independence he begins:

"Most fortunate Emperor, I am in constant solicitude, but never have I been so troubled with anxiety as at the present time, when I find myself obliged to defend myself against the danger of taking part in a sacrilege. I beseech you to listen to my words, for, if I be not worthy of being listened to, then am I also unworthy of offering for you the Holy Sacrifice and of receiving the confidences of your piety and prayers. Will you not listen to one speaking in his own cause, to whom you have so often listened when pleading for others? It is the part of an Emperor not to fear liberty of speech; the part of a Priest to say what he thinks."<sup>1</sup>

Then alluding to the fall of Maximus, which had followed soon upon a measure very much of the kind Theodosius had now sanctioned, "See," he says, "on what a path you are about to enter. The courage of the Bishop is no less to be dreaded than his weakness. If he be brave, then you will make him a martyr. If he be weak, then you will have caused his fall; for when the weak falls, he who has caused

<sup>1</sup> Neque imperiale est libertatem dicendi negare neque sacerdotale quod sentias non dicere. Ep. xl. 2.

him to do so is chiefly responsible.<sup>1</sup> Are you not afraid that the Bishop may come to you and say, 'Yes, it was I who did it all; I assembled the crowd, I excited it: strike me, therefore, and let the others go. Happy lie, which shall gain for those others their absolution, and for himself the grace of martyrdom.'<sup>2</sup>

"And then how will you have the sentence executed? Will you send to the East your victorious flags, stamped with the sacred Labarum, to re-establish the synagogue? Try to have the Labarum carried into the synagogue, and see if the people do not resist.<sup>3</sup> We read in history that in former times temples were raised to Roman idols with the spoils of the Cimbri; now the Jews will write upon their synagogue, 'This temple was built with the spoils of the Christians.'"

This vehement apostrophe is followed by words the intention of which is very evident: "I have now laid my request before you with all possible respect. I have tried to make you hear it in your Palace, that it may not be necessary to make it heard in the Church."<sup>4</sup>

But whether it was that Theodosius did not understand the import of these words, or thought Ambrose had exceeded proper limits in addressing him, or that the incident did not deserve so much notice, Ambrose

<sup>1</sup> Plus enim astringitur qui labi infirmum cogeret. Ep. xl. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Beatum mendacium quo acquiritur aliorum absolutio sibi gratia. Ep. xl. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Jube labarum synagogæ inferri videamus si non resistunt.

<sup>4</sup> Certi quod honorificentius fieri potuit feci ut me magis audires in regia, ne, si necesse esset, audires in ecclesia. Ep. xl. 27, 33.

returned to Milan his letter unanswered, and the orders he complained of neither withdrawn nor softened. The region where the offence had been committed was so remote, the details so little known in Milan, that the first time Theodosius came to the Church after Ambrose returned, the congregation did not for some time catch the drift of the subject he chose for his sermon. The text was, "I see a rod" (Jer. i. 11).

He explained the rod as being that of sacerdotal authority, which was intended to be salutary, not agreeable to those it struck. Then, in rather a circuitous way, he argues that the work of Christ, being one of justice as well as mercy, the office of His ministers is to correct as well as absolve. He refers to the old Law by which power was given to the Priest to exercise this salutary right of correction, and recalls the scene in which the prophet Nathan publicly reproves David: "God had heaped His benefits on you," he makes the prophet say in language more severe than the text of Scripture,<sup>1</sup> "and you dishonour His name before His adversaries, by wronging one of His humble servants."

The audience were still in the dark as to the allusion, but Theodosius understood and was seen to look uneasy. Ambrose looked him full in the face and said: "Yes, Emperor, I speak not only of you, but to you."<sup>2</sup> Remember that the more glory God has accorded you, the more respect and submission

<sup>1</sup> Tu auferes quod erat servuli mei in quo tibi peccatum inuritur et habebunt de quo adversarii mei gloriantur. Ep. xli. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ut non solum de te sed ad te verbo convertam.

do you owe Him. You ought to love the Body of Christ, that is His Church. You ought to wash, to kiss, to anoint His feet; that is, honour the very least among His ministers, and if they have done wrong, should pardon them, for the pardon of a sinner causes the angels in Heaven to rejoice.”<sup>1</sup>

“When I had done speaking,” wrote Ambrose next day to his sister Marcellina, “Theodosius came to me and said: ‘It was I then whom you made the subject of your discourse?’ I answered, ‘I said what I thought ought to be useful to you.’ Upon which he replied, ‘I allow it was rather hard to make the Bishop repair the synagogue, but that order I have corrected; and your monks often do a great deal of harm.’”<sup>2</sup> Here Symasius, Master of the Horse, interposed and began to abuse monks. ‘It is to the Emperor I am speaking,’ I said, ‘as it is right I should, he having the Fear of the Lord. Were I addressing you, who use such hard language, I should conduct myself in another manner.’ I was still standing before the Emperor and I said to him, ‘Make it possible for me to offer the Holy Sacrifice for you with a good conscience. Take this burden from my soul.’ He seated himself, signing to me that he would do what I asked, but not making any express promise. I did not move but stood facing him and presently he said he would modify his decision. ‘Cancel the order altogether,’ I said, ‘otherwise the governor whose business it is to

<sup>1</sup> Mille unguentum in pedes ejus, et sic honoras ultimos ut coram absolutione gaudeant angeli. Ep. xl. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Monachi multa scelera faciunt.

carry it into execution, will keep it hanging over the Christians in order to torment them.' This he promised me he would do. 'I go then on your word' (ago fide tua) I said to him, repeating twice over 'your word.' 'Go, on my word,' he answered. And I mounted to the Altar which I would not have done had his promise been anything less than complete. And I felt so much grace in offering the Holy Sacrifice, that I was sure I had done what was pleasing to our God and that He had helped me by His Divine Presence."<sup>1</sup>

We may imagine the curiosity and interest with which the congregation, assembled in the Church, watched the faces of Emperor and Bishop during the dialogue. The subject under discussion was unknown, but the Emperor's expression showed he was displeased even while he made some concession. The moral authority of Ambrose, which had perhaps seemed to wane a little under the new reign, acquired from this encounter a vigour it had never had before. There was, however, a certain risk that the Emperor might afterwards resent having been, as it were, against his will, brought to make terms, and that this not unnatural feeling would be fostered by the jealousy of flattering courtiers. The theme was an old one. Episcopal interference in State affairs, if permitted at all, would in the case of so prominent a Bishop as Ambrose, end in his influence predominating over every other. Ambrose had also created for himself a dangerous precedent. He had made an appeal where he had no personal

<sup>1</sup> Ep. xli. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

interest at stake, and it had been successful. He would be asked to intercede for others; if he consented he would be perpetually involved in difficult questions; and if he refused would be accused of cowardice. But the Emperor was the best of Emperors, his power was absolute, and Ambrose soon proved that he was equal to the difficult and responsible task that fell upon his shoulders.

It was the wish of Theodosius to leave the Western Empire in a fit state to be governed by his young colleague, but while occupied in the more than sufficient task of re-establishing order for Valentinian, he was kept in perpetual anxiety by the news he received from the East. In Thessalonica, particularly, an outbreak, far surpassing in magnitude the one in which Ambrose had interfered on behalf of the Bishop of Callinicum, had suddenly developed from a wholly inadequate cause into scenes of violence and bloodshed.

No city would have seemed less liable to disturbance than Thessalonica the capital of Macedonia. The people were almost universally Catholic, the Church which could claim the great Apostle of the Gentiles himself, as its Founder, gloried in this origin. Theodosius often took up his residence there, sure of being well received. The governor, Count Botheric, was one of his personal friends. Nowhere had the late victories over Maximus been received with greater demonstrations of joy, and, in honour of them, a series of brilliant festivals was inaugurated by Botheric. No amusement was more popular in the East than the circus, and



this was made, as usual in such celebrations, a prominent feature in the festivities. One charioteer in particular won great applause by his skill, and, at the close of each performance, was made the subject of a kind of ovation. He was, however, a man of bad character, and being found guilty of disgraceful debauchery, the governor had him put into prison. At this a general outcry arose for the favourite's release. Botheric however stood firm and refused. Then followed an insurrection of such violence, that the armed force called out proved incapable of subduing it. Botheric, who commanded this force, was killed as well as his principal officers, and the frantic crowd, falling on the bodies of the slain, pulled them to pieces and then bore the severed remains triumphantly through the streets.

When these horrible scenes were reported in Milan, Theodosius was at first thunderstruck; then, emerging from the kind of stupor into which he had fallen, he burst into a passion of rage, that to those accustomed to his ordinary habit, had something about it absolutely terrific. His threats were appalling. The blood of his friend cried for vengeance, the bodies of his servants had been made the plaything of the mob, the emblems of the Imperial authority had been torn and trampled under foot; and all this had taken place in a Christian city for the sake of a mountebank punished for a vile offence. No punishment could be too great for such guilt. "Since the whole town took part in the crime," he said, casting his usual prudence

to the winds, "the whole town shall smart for it."

It seems uncertain whether Ambrose had heard of the Emperor's fury. A contemporary asserts that he had, that he went to the Palace, saw and conversed with Theodosius and left him, comforting himself with the hope that, the irritation of the moment passed, he would return to a calmer frame of mind.<sup>1</sup>

But if any such change took place it was only a passing fluctuation; other counsels prevailed. It does not, indeed, seem altogether certain that it was not the untimely intercession of Ambrose that actually precipitated the horrible carnage that followed. No religious question was concerned, no minister of religion, no right, no interest of the Church involved. It was a favourable opportunity therefore, and perhaps for that reason, seized, to shew that the Church's intervention, in matters outside her province, would not be tolerated; that no right of enquiry into crime, or mode of punishment would be allowed her. This was a standpoint that ought not to offend Ambrose, who would hardly venture to claim the right to interfere in affairs of State simply because they were of exceptional gravity.

Theodosius was reminded that he had himself remarked with displeasure that Ambrose always

<sup>1</sup> It is to be remarked that in his letter to Theodosius, Ambrose mentions no change of this kind. On the contrary he says he could obtain the revocation of no order although he tried several times: *cum toties rogarem*.

knew before anyone else, what went on in the Consistory. Strict measures were now therefore taken to keep him in the dark. He should only know what form of reprisal was fixed on, when he heard of its having been put into execution. To avoid all inopportune questions from him or others, the Emperor left Milan, and stayed away until sufficient time had elapsed for his orders to reach Thessalonica.

Everything had been conducted with such secrecy that the terrible news burst on the world like a thunderclap. The Emperor's pitiless instructions were carried out to the letter, the authorities holding Botheric's place, feeling perhaps that their own safety depended on making themselves feared. The whole city was under reproach, the whole city was punished, and in a manner that had a certain ghastly affinity to the late tragedy. The circus had indirectly caused the crime, the circus was the scene of expiation. As before, games were announced; they were almost a repetition of the previous ones and a large concourse assembled to see them. The arena was then surrounded by soldiers, who, at a given signal, fell sword in hand on the unsuspecting crowd and cut them down regardless of age or sex. This was only the beginning of the massacre. It continued for hours and extended to every corner of the city, the wretched fugitives finding no place of safety. Everywhere the blood-bespattered streets were filled with the bodies of the dead.

It is not easy to believe that Theodosius com-

manded, or even imagined the possibility, of such horrible cunning and cruelty; there are indeed grounds for thinking he felt uneasy after sending his intemperate order, and did what he could to mitigate it by following it up with explanatory instructions which came too late. But, however this may have been, he had sent the orders; they bore his signature; he alone was responsible for the outrage on the public conscience, and the cry of horror that echoed from one end of the Empire to the other was directed against him personally, and if such was the public emotion, we may well believe that Ambrose was still more moved. On him, as on the rest of the world, the blow fell with horrible suddenness. The Emperor had made him no promise, but he may have hoped that his remonstrances—discontinued only out of prudence, Theodosius being evidently irritated by them—had produced some effect. What had really taken place, however, far exceeded his worst fears. The very day the news came, some Gallican bishops, passing through Milan, came to see him. They had just been in Rome, where they had obtained from Pope Siricius the deposition of the Bishops accused of having, out of complaisance to Maximus, connived at the execution of the Priscillianists. The conversation turning naturally on this subject, the wrong committed by a Christian minister who participates in a death sentence, was animadverted upon with great severity. There was a peculiar applicability to the circumstances of the moment in this conversation. “So soon as the event of the day was known,” says

Ambrose, "there was not one who did not groan ; not one who spoke of it with indifference ; no one supposed that such an act could be condoned in the communion of Ambrose, and I saw that the odium would fall on me if no one went to tell the author of it that reconciliation with God was required." <sup>1</sup>

Ambrose was not mistaken. All eyes were fixed on him. He was known to be a familiar guest at the Palace, and was reported to be the trusted confidant of Theodosius as he had been of Gratian. Had he then been in the secret of the Emperor's orders ? He certainly had not approved, but what had he done to oppose them ? There was good reason to know he did not hesitate to speak plainly where he thought it necessary ; and when he spoke, it was in a manner that commanded attention. Silence in such a case as this would have been little short of complicity. And, if he had not been the Emperor's confidant, had known nothing of the orders sent to Thessalonica, then he was bound to say so now, to clear himself from the suspicion of complicity in the terrible tragedy. It was not a personal matter. Had it been, Christian humility might have induced him to hold his tongue under unjust suspicion. But it was not his honour ; it was that of the Church that was at stake. The public penance of notorious sinners was still required by her laws, and was inflexibly enforced in the case

<sup>1</sup> *Nemo non ingemuit, nullus mediocriter accepit : non erat facti tui absolutio in communione Ambrosii. In me amplius commissi invidia exaggeraretur, si nemo diceret Dei reconciliationem fore necessariam. Ep. li. 6.*

of the weak and humble; would these laws be relaxed towards Theodosius because he wore a crown? Such indulgence would be only less a scandal than the crime itself. The Emperor had assumed the office of Defender of the Faith. Was he for that reason to be allowed to violate every precept of the Faith and not to be punished? Should it be said that the Church forgave everything to those who defended her rights and fought her enemies? And, if this were so, why had the martyrs died, what purpose had the zeal of the Apostles served? If Christian Caligulas and Catholic Neros were to be allowed to approach with unblushing front, the Altars on which the Cross had supplanted the old idols, then the conversion of the Empire might as well have been left undone, heathen worship not have been disturbed in its temples.

Ambrose had no doubt of his duty. The law of God required open satisfaction from the Emperor. As the Shepherd of his soul he must appeal to his conscience and try to draw him out of the "net of iniquity" into which, to use a Scriptural phrase, he had fallen. But he had first to reflect how to bring his warning home to the Emperor's conscience. When he spoke, it must be to be heard to the end, and he had good reason to fear interruption, for he knew only too well that at Court his was a jealously suspected influence. Nor was it now, as in the case of the Bishop of Callinicum, an order not made public and easily retracted that was in question, but an accomplished fact, a heinous deed done in the face of the world and that nothing could undo.

In that sense it was irreparable; but in another it loudly demanded reparation, the open public reparation of confession of sin and penance.

Ambrose did nothing hastily. He delayed as long as he could the critical interview at which his reception might have been such as to forbid the possibility of his return. He happened to be unwell, as was indeed very often the case owing to overwork, and he went to a friend's house in the country for a few days' rest. When he came back to Milan he did not, as was his usual affectionate habit after a short separation, go at once to see Theodosius. At the end of two or three days, feeling his absence must have been noticed, he wrote to tell the Emperor, who had lately returned, why he had not come:

"You know," he wrote, "that I cherish the memory of our old friendship, and of the benefits I have received from you. You will understand then, that it is not without regret that I have not come to see you on your arrival; you who in other days would have been so welcome to me, and whom nothing would have made me delay two, then three, days without seeing.<sup>1</sup> But what could I do?"

He has noticed, he says, that he is kept at a distance and that complaints of his being too well informed of what goes on in the Emperor's council, have been made. How was he then to behave? "Should I hear nothing? close my ears up with wax as is told in some fables? Should I speak? I feared if I spoke that I should provoke some stringent order.

<sup>1</sup> *Emori maluissem quam adventum tuum duo vel triduo non expectare. Sed quid facerem, non erat. Ep. li. 5.*

Should I therefore hold my tongue? That would be the worst of all; for to hold my tongue would be to put chains on my conscience. The Priest who does not warn the evil-doer, who lets him perish in his error, is guilty of not having shown him the light. Let me tell you also, august Emperor, you fear God, I know, but your nature is very impetuous and as you may be spoken to, either to calm or to irritate you, so are you moved either to mercy or to uncontrollable anger. I wished therefore to leave you to yourself to overcome the impulsiveness of your nature by your piety."

But, having decided to speak there must be no half measures: "What has been done in Thessalonica," he says in the plainest words, "has no parallel within human memory."<sup>1</sup> And this being the case there is one only remedy. The Emperor must give evidence of his penitence. "Why should you be ashamed, O Emperor, to do what David did, who was, according to the flesh, the author of the line from which Christ descended and to say as he did to Nathan the prophet: 'I have sinned against the Lord.' " He quotes from Scripture other examples of great penitents, then goes on: "I do not recall these examples for the sake of humbling you, but that you may efface this sin from the memory of your reign; and this you can only do by humbling your soul before God, for sin is effaced only by tears and penance. Neither angel nor archangel can say to the sinner: 'I am with you.' You are human; temptation has fallen

<sup>1</sup> Factum est in urbe Thessalonicæ quod nulla memoria habet. Ep. li. 6.



on you. Overcome it. I counsel, I beseech, I conjure you to do this, for my grief is extreme, that you, who were the model of piety, who had so often given such signal examples of your clemency, who had so often pardoned the guilty, should have caused so many innocent to perish. Your piety was the crown of all the glory you had won, a crown the devil wished to rob you of. Drive him from you while still you have the means to overcome him. I have no cause to be angry with you as you know; but I have great cause for fear. I dare not offer the Holy Sacrifice if you were present. I could not do it, if the blood of only one innocent person had been shed; and could I when so many have died? I think not. I write this to you with my own hand that you also may read it alone."

There would have been a certain grandeur in the generous spontaneous movement thus suggested, all the credit of which Ambrose clearly wished to leave to the royal penitent. He refrains from suggesting any particular mode of expiation, leaving the choice to the Emperor himself. He does not speak of the spiritual chastisements which, according to canonical law, will be incurred by delay in doing penance. He says, in point of fact, not one word that can be construed into the desire imputed to him by some historians, to make capital out of public feeling against the Emperor, and claim for the priesthood authority over the Empire.

But this reserve had no effect apparently. The Emperor's advisers, if they saw the letter, may have set him on his guard against some interpretation

which they put on the straightforward words of Ambrose. Or perhaps the Emperor, too proud to show the letter to any one, decided for himself. It was ignored and left unanswered. He counted, no doubt, on meeting with no opposition whenever it suited him to brave the bishop; but he would have been better advised to expect it, for, when he went to the Basilica, accompanied as usual by his suite, Ambrose, arrayed in his Episcopal vestments, met him in the vestibule, and, standing before him to bar his entrance, gravely said: "Stop, Emperor, I see you do not fully understand the gravity of the murders you have committed; for, even now that your anger is appeased, your reason does not measure the extent of your crime. No doubt your great power blinds you; your reason is darkened by your being free to do what you please. But remember that human nature, yours as well as other men's, is frail and mortal, and that all must return to the dust whence we came. Let not, therefore, the glory of the purple you are clad in, deceive you as to the infirmity of the body it covers. The men you rule are of the same nature as you; you and they are subject to the same power. For us all there is indeed but one Emperor. He Who is the Creator of all things. With what eyes will you now look on the temple of our common Master? With what feet will you dare to tread the floor of His Sanctuary? How will you dare to lift to Him your bloodstained hands? How can such hands touch the Sacred Body of Christ? How will you carry His Blood to those lips by whose angry words has

been shed the blood of so many of the innocent? Retire, lest entering, you add yet another sin to those you have already committed. Accept the bond that the Sovereign Lord imposes on you, a remedy that will give back health to your soul."

These strong words visibly affected Theodosius. He listened with bowed head and, as the writer who describes the scene tells us, with tears in his eyes, and because he understood "that the duty of priests is not as that of kings," he withdrew without making any further attempt to enter the Church.

But, though the depths of the heart might be touched, political motives kept him from yielding. The dreaded rival authority censuring all his acts and claiming a right to dispose of the executive power, of which so much had been said to him, was still a bugbear that effectually silenced his scruples; and eight months dragged on without his making the slightest advance to Ambrose, who, on his side, gave no signs of relenting. Relations between Church and palace were broken off. Time only aggravated the situation and, Christmas being at hand, everybody began to wonder whether the Emperor would be the one Christian excluded from the general rejoicing on the great Festival when the Church hails her new-born Saviour.

Theodosius, sad and solitary in his palace, asked himself the same question. It was in some such moment of troubled reflection that Rufinus, the palace prefect, coming to him for instructions, found him in a dejected attitude, his face bathed in

tears. It was said that this prefect, if he had not actually urged on the massacre, had very strenuously advised the Emperor to submit to no control in the exercise of his authority. "What is the matter with you?" he asked, his tone conveying a reproach to the Emperor for his weakness. "You laugh, Rufinus," replied Theodosius, "but you do not know how I suffer. The Church of God is open to beggars and thieves; they go freely in to offer God their prayers. But to me the Church is closed, and the gates of heaven too, for I cannot forget that Our Lord has said, 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven.'" "Is that all?" said Rufinus; "I will go straight to the bishop. I will get out of him what you cannot."

"No," said the Emperor, "you will not succeed in softening him, for I know his is a just sentence, and I am convinced that the whole power of the Empire would not suffice to make him violate the divine law." Rufinus, however, not satisfied with this answer, urged his proposal and at last Theodosius let him go, hoping perhaps that the importance of the messenger might seem a sufficient satisfaction to Ambrose by proving to him the great value attached to his decision. Theodosius himself, to lose no time in hearing the result of this embassy, followed closely on Rufinus.

But the effect was exactly the opposite of what was intended. The Emperor usually employed Rufinus to carry his orders, and Ambrose no sooner saw him, than, expecting he was sent to say the Emperor would force an entrance into

the Church, he cried: "What brings you here? What is your shameless purpose? Are you not known for one of those who counselled the massacre? and should not that remembrance fill you with confusion?" Rufinus, disconcerted by this reception, only answered: "The Emperor is coming; do not repulse him." "Let him come," said Ambrose, "but let him know that if he pass beyond the vestibule of the Church, I will expel him myself; and if he choose then to act the part of tyrant, not Emperor, gladly will I offer my body to his blows."

Rufinus, only anxious after this to bring to a close an interview that seemed so unlikely to end as he wished, hastened to meet the Emperor who by this time was come half way to the Church. In the public street where he met him, he told him what had happened and warned him to go no further. "Yes," said the Emperor, "I will go on and submit to the humiliation I have deserved." Then approaching the entrance of the Church, where Ambrose stood waiting for him, he entreated him to consent to relieve him of his sin.

But Ambrose, still incredulous, and thinking that command would follow entreaty, answered: "What do you want? What daring brings you here to trample under foot the divine law?" "I am not come to dare," answered Theodosius, now thoroughly humble, "but to ask for deliverance and to entreat you, in the name of mercy and of our common Lord, not to shut to me the door that is open to every sinner who repents." "What are the signs of

your repentance?" asked Ambrose; "what remedies have healed your wounds?" "It is for you to point them out to me," said the Emperor, "for me to accept them."

His submission was, in fact, complete, and Ambrose, who had desired only that it should both be, and appear to be, a voluntary submission, required, wished for nothing more. It was the victory of faith over pride and passion—a victory Ambrose used neither for his personal glorification, nor even to vaunt the power of the Church in the subjugation of Imperial pride: The expiation he exacted from the Emperor took shape in the ordinary exercise of his authority. Then and there he was to enact a decree, but one that inaugurated a new departure: justice and moderation were to be its only motives. It was to declare that henceforth no sentence of confiscation or death could be published until thirty days after it was passed, when it was to be re-considered and if necessary revised. Directly this law had been signed and declared, the bar that kept Theodosius out of the Church was drawn back, and hastily entering he fell on his face, and touching the floor with his forehead, he repeated aloud the words of the Psalm: "My soul cleaveth to the dust: O quicken thou me according to Thy word." Then followed the office which was celebrated as usual with one difference. When the time came for the communion, Ambrose sent word to the Emperor that he was to come to the Altar with the rest of the faithful, instead of waiting for the communion to be carried

to him where he sat in a place reserved for him in the choir; a not very decorous custom he had brought with him from Constantinople. When given this notice Theodosius thanked the bearer and then obeyed. "In truth," he said, afterwards recalling this strange day, "only Ambrose ever showed me what a bishop is."

It was not only Theodosius whom the bishop's power astonished. No effort of Ambrose could alter the natural aspect of the case to the world in general. A duel had taken place between the Empire and the Episcopate from which the latter had issued greater than before—and not greater only, but in the historical sense absolutely transformed. Events followed which drew Ambrose into untried paths and made the people look to him, not only as the shepherd of their souls, consecrated by divine institution to the dignity of that great spiritual office, but as their protector. He had saved the community from slavery to a despot, when no other power could cope with the common danger; and afterwards, in the terrible invasion that swept over Italy, carrying men and things before it, he was the chosen champion of the people's right to justice. Every city by one of the laws of Valentinian I. had what was known as its "Defender," an advocate whose business it was to protect the city against excessive taxation and the petty tyranny of the governor. But it was Ambrose who became Milan's real defender, whoever held the title and office; Ambrose who brought Theodosius to the foot of the Altar, and by so doing inaugurated the long series of events that culminated when Leo,

by the simple power of his word, drove Attila back from Rome.

No thoughtful reader of history can fail to remark the moral lessons that stand out among what appear to be mere chances of fortune. The crime of Theodosius, in comparison to those of his infamous predecessors, Tiberius, Nero, Caligula, Domitian, Heliogabalus, and the rest, was neither very great nor very heinous. But neither gods, men, priests nor philosophers ever called these human monsters to account for their misdeeds. On the contrary, while they were alive, they commanded unresisting obedience, and when they died they received the honours of apotheosis. The temples of their gods were not only never closed to them, but, in the Pantheon, a place among their gods was assigned to them.

Not till the advent of the Gospel was any reparation offered for this long tradition of offence against the majesty and sanctity of Almighty God. Theodosius, in this aspect, did penance for three hundred years of crime and sacrilege, but the reparation came too late to ward off the temporal consequences of this accumulated guilt. The hour of chastisement had struck, and even the prayers of an Ambrose could not avert retribution.

In a short time Theodosius had to return to the East, where, indeed, all along his presence had been urgently required, for one insurrection had followed another ever since he left. An indelible impression had however been made on him, and he returned to set himself with increased zeal to the double task he



had undertaken—the destruction of paganism and the repression of heresy.<sup>1</sup>

His parting instructions to Valentinian were in the same tone, and he left Milan commending him to the care of Ambrose. This guidance the young Emperor, who had been a moved spectator of his brother-in-law's reconciliation to the Church, readily accepted. He was at this time in his twentieth year, but he had none of a young man's headstrong self-assertion. Chaste, sober, austere, he even exceeded the advice of Ambrose in his religious practices, foregoing all vain and frivolous amusements, as well as those that were sinful. He prayed, fasted, attended all the offices of the Church, and lived in affectionate domestic intercourse with his sisters, Justa and Grata, who, under the direction of Ambrose, were advancing in the path of perfection. The Emperor's devotion did not however in any way interfere with the duties of his state, and was betrayed in his public life only by the gentleness that tempered his absolute rule. He is said to have had a great contempt for the informers who haunted the Imperial Court, a miserable race generated by centuries of distrust. Each of his predecessors in turn had feared his own servants as possible assassins; but Ambrose relates that when Valentinian

<sup>1</sup> Two of his laws bear the date of Milan and are addressed to the Prefect of Italy, but neither can be placed among his milder enactments. There can be no doubt, however, that they were chiefly intended for application in the East, and were either not applied at all, or certainly not with any vigour, in the West, particularly in Rome where paganism had still too strong a hold to be abolished by any interdict.

was told of plots that would have made another Emperor tremble, he only smiled.

He tried to model his court on the lines he followed in his own life, and this, and the substitution of justice for the old system of favourites was, it need hardly be said, resented. The first open manifestation of hostility came from Arbogastes, the commandant of the army. This officer, of Goth origin as his name indicates, had won the favour of Theodosius by his brilliant services in the late battles with Maximus, and for these services Theodosius had rewarded him by leaving him in Milan to be a kind of military tutor to Valentinian. His sphere of influence, and that of Ambrose, were of course distinct, but points of contact were unavoidable and became, unfortunately, points of collision. The general, confident in his position and in himself, assumed a superior authority; and when he found that the Emperor had ideas of his own and was capable of asserting his will, he traced this unexpected independence to a source he was already inclined to suspect. He then began a system of opposition which met the Emperor at every turn; it was enough for him to make any proposition for Arbogastes to invent some way of thwarting him, now by delaying an order, now by issuing a contrary one, and sometimes by refusing point blank to execute the Emperor's commands. Gradually also, he filled the court with officers chosen by himself from the army on whose implicit obedience he knew he could rely, until at last the Emperor was little better than a prisoner among his servants.

This almost insupportable position Valentinian

impatiently submitted to, until, at the suggestion of Arbogastes, or rather by his orders, he went to Gaul. No Emperor had been there since the death of Maximus, and it was supposed the provinces and the legions stationed in them would be the better for being brought into touch with the living authority. The programme of the expedition was preconcerted. The young sovereign was a lay figure in the drama, only nominal honour was paid to him; sometimes not even this, as at Vienne where he was left deserted in the palace, the local magnates not daring to pay him their respects. So distressing was his position that he is said to have written complaints to Theodosius, but no answer came. Constantinople was a far cry, posts travelled slowly, letters often did not reach their destination.

A transient gleam of authority only was permitted to the unfortunate young man. The Roman senators, imagining that in the absence of Ambrose the young Emperor might be induced to make some concession, sent all the way to Gaul to make fresh intercession for their Altar. But this deputation (it was the fourth they had sent) fared no better than the previous ones. Valentinian had not forgotten the scene in which, as a child, he had taken part—he was true now, as then, to his conscience. “And yet,” says Ambrose, “I was not there. There had not even been time for me to write to him.”

On this occasion, Arbogastes had not interfered at all, perhaps because he enjoyed the idea of Ambrose's annoyance. On the other hand, he would hardly have ventured to fly in the face of the well

known views of Theodosius by actively furthering the interests of the deputation. He therefore contented himself with simply allowing the senators free access to the Emperor.

It was, perhaps, the unusual liberty permitted to him in this episode that gave Valentinian courage a few days later to take a step which he fondly hoped would prove decisive.

He was seated on his throne in the Consistory which was assembled for business. Arbogastes was present, came up and handed him a paper. It was a military order filled in and needing only the Emperor's signature to be complete. He took it, but instead of signing it, put it on one side and handed Arbogastes another in its place, on opening which the commandant, to his rage and amazement, found he had in his hand an order depriving him of his command. Tearing it to bits, he scattered it on the ground, and facing the Emperor, said: "You did not give me the command and you have no right to deprive me of it." Valentinian cast about him an appealing glance, but no one spoke, no one moved to support him, then, flinging himself on the soldier who stood in front of the throne, he tried to wrest from him his sword. "What are you doing?" said Arbogastes, "do you intend to kill me?" "No," said Valentinian, "not you, but myself. I would rather die than reign without commanding." The two men then fell on each other, but were separated and the disturbed Consistory adjourned.

A time of suspense followed this unhappy incident, either party equally uncomfortable. Valentinian, in

constant dread of some military plot, would sign no army orders; Arbogastes, not a little anxious as to the view Theodosius would take of his conduct to his young brother-in-law, whom there was every reason to believe he really loved. A violent crisis of some kind was imminent and Valentinian, feeling the ground insecure under his feet, announced that he would return to Italy to repel an attack threatened on Illyria by the barbarians. It was impossible to meet this plan with overt opposition, but Arbogastes contrived that it should not be carried into execution. The control of military escorts being in his hands, he invented so many difficulties in providing one that the Emperor's departure was always delayed. At last Valentinian understood that he was virtually a prisoner with not a friend at hand to help or advise him. He had, even before this, written for Ambrose, but he did not come. In case the letter was intercepted, he had told him only that before he went out to battle, he desired to receive at his revered hands the Sacrament that opens the Gates of Heaven, for as yet he had not been baptised.

Ambrose, afterwards, sadly excused his delay. Valentinian's letters were, in the first place, so reticent that he had not realised his peril. He had also feared giving offence to the Gallic bishops by accepting the chief part in so important a function as an Emperor's baptism. But he did at last fix a day for his departure, and then a report was spread in Milan that the Emperor was coming back at once and that the palace was actually being put into readiness for him. This

made another delay, and when finally he set out it was too late.

The Emperor's impatience grew with every hour of waiting. Messenger after messenger left to meet and hasten the bishop on his way. The last of all was one of the Silentiaries, the Emperor's own guard, but in spite of the guarantee offered by the title of the corps, Valentinian evidently expecting him also to be stopped and cross-questioned, only wrote to Ambrose as the peace-maker who was coming to heal the breach between him and Arbogastes.<sup>1</sup> Every night before he went to bed, every morning when he woke, the same question rose to his lips, "Has the Silentiary come?"

But he did not come, Arbogastes having otherwise ordered. The bishop's reception would have to be public, and he was sure to be followed by a pious crowd, in presence of which as well as his troops, Arbogastes had no fancy for any repetition in his own person of the scenes that had taken place in Milan between Ambrose and Theodosius. He dreaded the bishop's demand for reconciliation, dreaded the questions he might ask, the requests he might make, and he cut the knot of all these difficulties by a barbarously simple method. There would be nothing for Ambrose to ask, nothing for Arbogastes to refuse, for Valentinian was dead before he could come.

It was given out officially, but no one believed this version of the story, that the Emperor had com-

<sup>1</sup> *Rescriptum accipio ut sine mora pergendum putarem quod vadem fidei haberem apud comitem tuum velles.*—"De obitu Valentiniani consolatio," 25.

mitted suicide in a fit of passion such as he fell into at the Consistory, the day he had threatened to take his life. But history has never penetrated the secret of his death. According to one account he was suffocated in his bed by the palace eunuchs; according to another he was attacked by assassins when he was walking on the banks of the Rhone and strangled, his dead body being afterwards hung to a tree. Passers by, it was said, had heard the cry, "Oh, my poor sisters," but were unable to come to his rescue.

These suspicions were darkly hinted, but regret was everywhere undisguised, even among those who had abandoned the young Emperor while he was alive, and allowed the crime to be committed. His youth, his virtues, his gifts, his physical graces, were everywhere extolled and compassion was in every heart. Arbogastes, universally reprobated for the cruel deed, attempted to divert public feeling by announcing that the body was to be carried to Milan, attended with every possible honour.

Ambrose was still on the Italian side of the Alps when he met the funeral procession. In Milan the people had come to speed his departure with prayers and good wishes for their Emperor's return, the chief personages and magistrates even charging him with a kind of commission to bring him back. All alike trusted him to overcome the resistance that was pretty generally anticipated.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Promiseram me profecturum respondens vel honoratis petentibus vel præfecto ut tranquillitate Italiæ consuleretur.—"De ob. Valent.," 24.

He was seized with horror when he learnt the terrible event that had taken place, and his return to Milan with the corpse of the beloved young sovereign was a strange, sad scene. "Everyone wept," he tells us; "those who had not known him, those who had feared him, those who had not loved him, the very barbarians themselves, and those who might have seemed to be our enemies."<sup>1</sup> The crowd in their grief almost turned on Ambrose himself, reproaching him with his delays. If he had been there, they said, this would not have happened. "But what could I have done?" he asks; "was I a prophet to know what would happen?"<sup>2</sup> And yet he too almost reproached himself that he had not hastened at the first call to rescue the son of his predilection.

It was resolved that Theodosius should be consulted before the funeral ceremonies were carried out, and Ambrose wrote to know what his wishes were, saying in allusion to Valentinian's affection for himself: "In his childhood he looked on me as his enemy, but thanks to you he looked on me afterwards as a father."<sup>3</sup> Until the letter from Theodosius should come the body was laid in a porphyry urn, near which Grata and Justa, the Emperor's sisters, watched night and day in tears.

<sup>1</sup> *Flent omnes, flent et ignoti, flent et timentes, flent et inviti, et barbari, flent et qui videbantur inimici.*—"De ob. Valent.," 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Omnes absentiam meam causam tuæ mortis appellant. . . . Non sum Elias, non sum propheta ut potuerim futurum cognoscere.*—"De ob. Valent.," 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ut quem adversarium repellebat nunc ut parentem putaret.*—"Ep." liii., 2.



There was another important object in his writing to Theodosius. On him depended the future of the Empire and the Church, in the alarming crisis that evidently was at hand, and of this Ambrose had discreetly to remind him.

Under ordinary circumstances, the commandant of the army would have been the proper person to give information of an event, which left him in sole command of the troops; but the courage of Arbogastes failed him in keeping up a deception by which he could hardly have expected to dupe Theodosius. By one course of action only could he have made himself independent. Had he, like Maximus, laid bold hands on the Imperial purple, he probably could have won over his troops by the methods Maximus had adopted. But this plan he could not have put into execution unless he had made up his mind to declare himself the murderer of the Emperor whose place he seized. His name too was a difficulty. Uncouth to Latin tongues and barbarous, it was one that scarcely could be written in the same list as those of Trajan, Diocletian, Constantine and Theodosius. What effect would such a name produce when proclaimed in the Senate, or wherever in Rome, or elsewhere, the traditions of the past were still preserved?

At last, however, he hit upon a plan which, while depriving him of none of the material advantages of his crime, would yet save appearances. This was to make an Emperor to order, one he could keep well in hand, and in whose name he would be allowed to reign. The army being an important factor in such

contingencies, he provided against future possibility of the empty title becoming something more solid, by selecting his subject altogether outside the military connection. Eugenius, an obscure rhetorician, who owed his advancement in civil life to his skilful pen, was proclaimed; and the allegiance of the army being secured by the usual means, that of the general public followed as a matter of course.

A deputation was next sent to Theodosius to inform him of these abrupt movements, and to ask him to extend to Eugenius the toleration he had not refused Maximus. A certain security was felt in the distance from Constantinople, especially as Theodosius, although still in the full vigour of life, was known to desire repose. The deputation was of a composite character; it consisted of a Pagan rhetorician and some bishops of the Province who had rallied round the rising sun. While this oddly assorted party was still making its slow way to the distant centre of authority, the letter from Theodosius to Ambrose arrived in Milan and the funeral ceremonies were carried out. Ambrose was to pronounce the funeral oration, and everyone wondered what he would say; how, without anticipating the judgment of Theodosius on Arbogastes' version of his own cause, would he find words responding to the general grief and indignation which he so deeply shared? The task he had to perform was perhaps one of the most difficult ever imposed on an orator, and he performed it with marvellous dexterity. For an hour the crowd hung in breathless interest on his words; now at once pathetic and political, always

bold, measured, moved and moving. In the whole address there was not a sentence that did not touch the chord that was vibrating in every heart: but it was the voice of the priest and not of the accuser, though an unbroken thread ran through the discourse, and from beginning to end every listener knew and shared the preacher's suspicions. He began with these fine words: "Valentinian has come but not as we expected. Not that he has failed in his promise to us. He heard the Alps that defend Italy were threatened by a barbarian foe, and he chose danger to share our dangers. This then has been an Emperor's crime, that he would have saved the Roman Empire! Who so distorted a noble plan as to make of it a crime?" The preacher apparently does not know, he does not even ask for an answer, but it hovers on every lip. The suggestion is all the clearer a little afterwards, because of the slight stress in turning it aside: "He dies while yet he treads the very entrance of the path of life. I speak of the suddenness of his death, not of its mode: for I mourn, I do not accuse."<sup>1</sup>

Presently he says that, had he arrived soon enough in Gaul, he would have done everything he could to restore peace and concord: then he speaks of the two other embassies in which he had been engaged. "Better is it," he cries, "for bishops to be persecuted by, than beloved of Emperors! Happier was I when it was I who risked my life for thee than to-day when I mourn thee dead."

<sup>1</sup> *De celebrat. non de gener. mortis loquitur: non cum accusantis voce aut sed dolens.* — "*De sb. Valenti.*" 33.

The names of Maximus and Gratian occur very often and with evident intention in the sermon; the allusion no one could mistake; that other crime, that other misfortune could be mentioned freely, it had been made public and avenged.

In fact this remarkable discourse is dedicated no less to the memory of Gratian than of Valentinian, brothers who had loved one another, and under the preacher's direction had trodden the same new path in the history of the Empire. Their portraits are filled in with the finest touches. Gratian, who lived at least long enough really to reign, is drawn in more virile, sterner lines than Valentinian, the beloved child, whose youthful beauty is traced with a fond hand. "O Valentinian, beautiful youth, with thine open, ruddy countenance, the image of Christ stamped on thy features!"<sup>1</sup> Then follows a beautiful and most touching picture of the meeting of the brothers in the home of eternal bliss, the orator borrowing from the mystic books of Holy Scripture the jewels that enrich his picture: "I see Gratian coming to meet him; he embraces him. 'Come, my brother,' he says, *let us go forth into the field; let us abide in the villages; let us get up early to the vineyards . . .*"<sup>2</sup> Let us go into the fields, that is, where labour is not unfruitful, where the harvest yields abundant seed. There shalt thou reap what on earth thou hast sown. Let us abide in the villages; that is, in the strong places, where the fierce wild beasts

<sup>1</sup> Valentinianus meus, juvenis et candidus et rubens habens in ore imaginem Christi.—"De ob. Valent.," 5.

<sup>2</sup> Canticle of Canticles.

of the earth cannot enter. Come into the bosom of Jacob, be at rest like the poor man in the bosom of Abraham." Gratian leads him on and on through the blissful bowers of the ethereal dwelling, angels and glorified souls, as they see him, asking: *Who is this that cometh up from the desert flowing with delights, leaning on his beloved?* "O, beloved brothers, happy both if my prayers prevail. No day shall pass without your names being on my lips, no night without my prayers rising for you. Your remembrance shall be with me when I offer the Holy Sacrifice. O Gratian, O Valentinian, alike in beauty, and equally dear, narrow limits confined your lives here, rapidly came the term of your days. Faster than the quick-flowing waves of the Rhone was the passage of your lives. . . In life undivided, death has not separated them. Simpler than doves, gentler than lambs, swifter than eagles. . . And as for me, O Lord, let me not in death be separated from those who in life were so dear to me, may I live with them in eternity, since it has not been given to me to enjoy longer here their tenderness."

Cautious as were these allusions, the veil was so transparent that the whole audience saw through it. Between Ambrose and the new government in Gaul, not even the semblance of cordiality was possible. But Arbogastes was too clever to forego at least an attempt to win the good will of the great bishop whose hold on public feeling he recognized. Eugenius, his puppet, was therefore instructed to treat Ambrose with the respect due from one power to another, by formally intimating to him his accession. "I did

not answer," says Ambrose, "because I knew what must happen."<sup>1</sup>

It hardly needed his sagacity to foresee that trouble awaited a government, composed of such incongruous elements, as a soldier of fortune and a pedant of the schools; nor was such a government likely to further the holy cause to which he was devoted. His presentiments were however not immediately fulfilled. The Gallic deputies arrived in Constantinople to find the Palace a house of mourning, The Empress Galla, in an advanced stage of pregnancy at the time, had died from the shock of her brother Valentinian's sudden death. Theodosius, for the second time a widower, might have made his bereavement an excuse for not receiving the ambassadors. But this probably would have provoked an immediate outburst of hostilities which Theodosius wished to avoid, his armaments not yet being ready for war. The ambassadors were therefore admitted, but only to a private audience. He listened in silence to the story it suited their purpose to tell, and then, without asking or answering any questions, he dismissed them, and by this means gained time to form his plans.

Arbogastes, on his side equally determined not to be taken at a disadvantage, was also preparing for the hostilities that this reception foreshadowed. The government he had established had a very insecure hold on the population, and his first care was to strengthen it. A successful campaign was

<sup>1</sup> In primordiis imperii tui scribenti non respondi quia istud prævidebam futurum.—Ep. lvii. No. 11.

the readiest method to do this, and a pretext was easily found for attacking the barbarian tribes on the Rhine frontier. The expedition was a fortunate one, and Eugenius, who followed the army, was at hand at the right moment to be brought into the camp to sign the treaty imposed on the subjugated tribes. But even in those remote regions, the murderer of Valentinian was pursued by the fame of Ambrose. One of his biographers recalls that, after the treaty was concluded, he invited some of the barbarian chiefs to dine with him, and one of them suddenly turned on him with the question: "Do you know one whom they call Ambrose?" Arbogastes, surprised, but equal to the occasion, answered, "Yes, I am one of his friends: I often dine with him." "Ah," replied his interrogator, "that accounts for your conquests; you are the friend of a man who says to the sun 'Stop' and it stops."

And, sooner or later, this redoubtable Bishop, whose fame had spread to unknown lands, must be faced. No one who was not effectually master of Milan was really Emperor. The capital of the Italian Prefecture, the city of Milan, lay also in the direct road to Rome, and Ambrose was in Milan. There was but small hope of winning him over by such measures as would have been easiest to command, but it might be possible to nullify the effects of his influence. The most obvious way of doing this was to make friends of his natural enemies. Polytheism was still a force to be reckoned with, not only among the uneducated

classes, but even in the higher ranks; there were still Pagan senators and magistrates, still men of letters, like Eugenius himself, a Christian in name, but in reality a worshipper only of Apollo and the muses. It was one of these cultivated Pagans, Flavian, Prefect of the Prætorium, who was chosen to be the bearer of congratulations to the Emperor in Gaul, from the Eterhal City, and, on this opportune occasion, the reconciliation was made. A tacit understanding had, in fact, preceded the arrival of the Prefect and his co-religionists. The Altar of Victory would not be restored, but the revenues confiscated by late edicts, were to be handed over, on such terms that they could be applied in any way or place that the interested party pleased. The tendency of this manœuvre was patent to all, and Ambrose thoroughly understood and grasped the situation he now had to deal with. Apart from the inevitable peril to individual souls, he was perhaps not sorry to be relieved from the embarrassment of dealing with a masked enemy. The repugnance with which he had anticipated meeting the murderers of Valentinian, is easy to understand. But, on mere grounds of unconfirmed suspicion, to refuse official intercourse with the representative of the Imperial government would have been almost impossible. There had indeed been no overt violation of precedent in the election of Eugenius. Neither the principle of heredity nor popular suffrage was the recognised rule of succession; and, as it was no duty of a bishop to pronounce on the validity of an Emperor's



title, Ambrose had made no break in the official intercourse that necessarily went on between his own very important diocesan Court and the Imperial Chancelry.<sup>1</sup> His own antecedents, the decided stand he had taken on other occasions where the same issue was at stake, left him indeed only one alternative. He might, had not a sense of propriety restrained him, have stayed in Milan to meet the Emperor and defy him to his face.

But he preferred to leave the city before the Emperor was to arrive, writing him a letter which was to be publicly handed to him. He addressed him in the proper conventional form, giving as his reason for absenting himself, the duty he owed to the Law of God and the honour of the Church: "Ambrose, bishop, to the most clement Emperor Eugenius: Seek no other cause for my departure than that fear of God, which rules all my actions and makes me seek the favour of Christ rather than that of men. . . . To you I must hold the same language that I have held to other emperors before you. . . ." He then rehearses the various stages through which the question, thus unexpectedly revived, had already passed, and this done, he speaks scathingly of the subterfuge that has been adopted.

"Consider, Emperor," he says, "that God sees the depths of the heart, that to Him every conscience is open. He hears every throb of your heart, to Him all things are present before they exist. You do not surely wish to be deceived? It is a small

<sup>1</sup> Ubi causa emersit officii mei, scripsi et rogavi.—Ep. lvii. 12.

thing to us that you give away with such liberality the revenues taken from the temples; we envy not your generous gifts. But no one will regard what you have done; all will see that it was your desire to do what they do to whom you have handed over these revenues; you will act through them."

He has repressed his feelings hitherto, but now he cries: "I have held my tongue a long time, I was dumb in my grief, but no longer may I keep silence."<sup>1</sup>

The progress of the voluntary exile became a series of popular ovations. In Bologna, Florence, and all the large towns, he was received with respectful enthusiasm. His visits were everywhere anxiously expected; everywhere he was asked to perform some pious ceremony; here to bless a sanctuary, there to ordain priests or consecrate Virgins; the sick also were brought to him that he might heal or at least console them. He preached constantly, stirring his hearers by his strong ardent speech to make a final struggle for the faith. Meantime Eugenius, "the tyrant" (as he was called), made his entry into Milan, and was received with icy silence and deserted streets, the people studiously avoiding him. Even in church he was left in conspicuous isolation, the priests refusing his proffered gifts. This general coldness was emphasized, rather than discounted, by the acclamation of scattered Pagan groups marshalled by Flavian, the Prefect of the Prætorium; and these demonstrations, such as they were, were

<sup>1</sup> Certe diu tacui, diu pressi dolorem, nulli quidquam intimandum putavi: dissimulare mihi non licet, tacere liberum non fuit.—  
Ep. lvii. 11.

in honour of the restored gods rather than of the new Emperor.

Feeble, timid as yet, this resuscitated Paganism, when reported in Constantinople, roused the dormant energies of Theodosius. Vigour and promptitude were qualities the world had learnt to respect in him, and that he had failed for once to exhibit them had caused universal surprise. Aged before his time, he seemed to have lost the confidence of earlier years, and to be the prey of dark foreboding. Victory itself would only launch him into fresh difficulties. To govern both East and West at the same time was impossible for any ruler; and, if his arms were victorious, who would govern the West? His sons, Arcadius and Honorius, were both very young, the latter a mere child, and, with the fate of Gratian and Valentinian before him as a warning, it was small wonder that an affectionate father should shrink from imposing on either the perilous honours of the Imperial dignity. This indecision, foreign to his nature as it was, might have been prolonged had he consulted only his own desire for repose. But Theodosius had devoted the energy of his best years to the defence of the fundamental truth that God is One, and the revival, even in a disguised form, of the opposing doctrine of Polytheism, acted on him as an incentive to immediate action. Rising from the troubled watches of sleepless nights, in which he may have communed in spirit with the exiled Ambrose, he braced himself to the task that lay before him.

The war that followed was a religious war: this was understood in both camps from the outset. Theodosius prepared for it, not so much by marshalling his forces, as by solemn public invocation of the Divine Protection, and by private prayer and fasting that showed the deep sincerity of his faith and the very personal nature of his piety. In the opposite camp, meantime, Arbogastes, now hand in glove with Flavian, had overcome the weak resistance of the nominal Emperor (who would have preferred offending no party) and thrown off all disguise. Pagan standards floated over the army, the statue of Hercules crowned the Fort guarding the entrance to the chief pass into Italy, auspices and the entrails of victims were consulted, and Flavian, in his own opinion an expert in the science of augury, pronounced all the omens favourable. "We will come back conquerors," shouted Arbogastes, "and turn their Churches into stables, their clerics into soldiers."

He had reinforced his army, originally formed by Theodosius, from the conquered German tribes. A better general than Maximus, he took personal command of his troops, and skilfully concentrated them on the fortified town of Aquileia, and on this firm base he awaited attack. The first day's battle had no very decisive result, but, unprepared for the strength of the enemy, the army of Theodosius wavered a little. Reinforcements being expected, it was suggested to him that it might be prudent to retire to give them time to come up. But, seeing that even the appearance of distrusting

the protection of God, would be fatal, he answered with the vigour of other days: "The Cross should never fall back even for one day, before the image of a false god. Tomorrow will show what the God of Theodosius will do." The issue of the next day's battle was decided by an unexpected incident. One of the barbarian cohorts of Arbogastes, deserting him, and passing over to the opposing camp, left undefended the passage it had been posted to guard. The manœuvre was so suddenly executed that Eugenius, surprised in his tent where he was waiting for news, mistook his captors for messengers come to announce that Theodosius was a prisoner. He had hardly recovered from the shock when he found himself at the feet of his conqueror. He was in the act of kneeling to ask for mercy, when one of the soldiers standing by, struck him a blow on the neck with his sword and cut off his head.

From his tent, on the field of battle, Theodosius wrote at once to Ambrose to tell him of the victory that was their common triumph. He asked him to thank God for it, and tell him what use to make of it. He can scarcely have known where this letter would find the bishop who had travelled on from town to town in North Italy, stirring up the people's faith and inciting them to resistance, and everywhere meeting with the same honourable reception. It found him in Milan where, to be on the spot when news came to hand, he went when the battle was imminent. His answer was that of both a Christian bishop and a Roman citizen. The

Empire, the Church, threatened together, had escaped together. "You did not think I was here," he wrote, "but I had greater confidence in your courage and genius. I never doubted that God would respond to your piety and help you to deliver the Roman Empire from impious hands. You wish me to thank Him for your victory, and I shall do so from the bottom of my heart. Others would ask for triumphal arches; you for acts of sacrifice and thanksgiving offered to God by His Priests . . . . This then is what I did. I took your letter to the Altar, and laid it there, that I might be the mouth-piece of your Faith. God must indeed look favourably on the Roman Empire, since He gives it such a Prince; such a father, greater than other Emperors in virtue, greater in humility than are His Priests. What have I left to wish for? What to desire? In you my wishes meet, in you they are accomplished."

He could not wait for Theodosius to come to Milan. He hastened to him at Aquileia, impatient to see, to confer with the hero in whom he saw the Envoy God had commissioned to form the ideal Christian Empire, he hoped and prayed to see established.

But these high hopes shared the fate that has overtaken so many of the noblest human dreams. Theodosius soon came to Milan, his arrival being preceded by one of his secretaries, who was the bearer of an amnesty as wide and full in its conditions, by the advice of Ambrose, as possible, and which was read out in the large Basilica, where

many of those implicated in the late disturbances had taken refuge in dread of reprisals; among them the families of Flavian and Arbogastes.

Then the whole city gave itself up to joy and festivity. But it was noticed when the Emperor came, that he seemed to take no share in the rejoicing; and that an expression of unwonted melancholy overshadowed his fine features. He seemed strangely oppressed by the remembrance of the terrible scenes of bloodshed he had just witnessed, and unable to disconnect them with similar scenes of former days. He certainly did not doubt the justice of the cause in which he had been engaged, but nevertheless with a touching conscientious scruple, he voluntarily abstained for some days from approaching the Sacraments. Soon the news spread that the Emperor was suffering from a malady of old standing, which the fatigue of the late campaign had developed into an acute state that made further concealment impossible. It was water on the chest, and in a few days it had made such rapid progress that it became evident the end was not far off. With the calm that becomes a Christian, Theodosius prepared to die, forgetful of the things of earth, except so far as he could make arrangements for the future welfare of the Empire.

He sent for both his sons: Arcadius, whom he had raised to the rank of an Augustus, and Honorius, still almost a child, and divided the government of the Empire between them; the East to Arcadius, the West to Honorius, an arrangement which he hoped

would stand permanently. Each was to reign as an independent sovereign, a new plan; for always before, even when there was more than one titular Emperor, the Empire itself had been supposed to be one and indivisible.

Before he died, several deputations arrived to offer him congratulations that had little meaning for a dying man; but, determined to fulfil every duty to the end, he received them personally. One was from the Roman Senate, and upon this occasion the Christian element predominated. Certain Pagan senators had, however, volunteered to take part in it, and these the Emperor directly addressed, exhorting them, with the authority of approaching death, to embrace the Faith that "can alone save States and deliver men from their sins." Then, observing that his words seemed to take little effect, he warned them curtly not to count in future upon any subvention from the Treasury for their temples or Altars, and to this they listened with a disappointment they were not able to conceal. This was his last political act. On the 10th of January, A.D. 395, he made a point of being present at some public festivities held in his honour; but before they were over, he was attacked by suffocation. He died the same night, not four months after his last victory.

Ambrose had given too wide publicity to his joy, had too little disguised his confidence in the future, not to be sorely tried by this sudden reverse; but not for an instant did his submission to the Will of God fail in this, perhaps the sharpest trial it



had ever had to undergo. Rising from his own grief, he thought only of keeping others from falling into the dejection and anxiety he refused to indulge in himself. He preached at the solemn ceremony which took place when the Emperor's body was brought to the Basilica, and courage and confidence were the chief notes of his sermon. Honorius, at the head of the funeral procession, was to start from the Church and conduct the remains to the confines of the Western Empire, where Arcadius, who had already left for Constantinople, was to meet the procession and take his brother's place. During the ceremony, every eye was fixed on the young Emperor, his presence giving peculiar interest and meaning to the preacher's words. Theodosius, said Ambrose, was dead, but he lived again in his sons; they would continue his race, inherit his faith, virtues, genius, fortune, and he appealed to his audience to share his confidence in this succession.

"The great Emperor," he said, "is gone from us, but he is not altogether dead. He has left us his children, and in them let us recall him, still behold, still possess him. Do not let their youth disquiet you. His faith gave us the victory, let our faith give courage to his sons. Faith may supply the place of years. What is faith indeed? Scripture tells us it is the substance of things to be hoped for, how much more should it give substance to the things we see? It was this inheritance of faith that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob left us. By faith, not by works, was Abraham justified: by faith

## THE LIFE OF SAINT AMBROSE

Isaac saw, without fear, the sword his father raised above his head to strike him: Jacob, because he diligently kept the faith of his fathers, saw Angelic hosts.<sup>1</sup>

“How can we doubt that God will keep the sons of such a father? Arcadius, thank God, is in the full vigour of his youth; Honorius still stands on the threshold, but he is older than Joseph was when he was stolen from his father.”

No sermon of this kind would have been complete without some mention of the virtues of the dead man; but Ambrose points out that the qualities that shone before the world, were not so important as the virtues that merited the mercy of God—his clemency, his humanity, and, above all, the humility of which he had given signal proofs that were present in the minds of all.

“I loved the man,” he says, as if not unconscious that this expression of his own feelings would be important in the Christian world, “I loved him, because, divesting himself of all his regal state, he wept publicly for his sins and asked for pardon with groans and tears. I loved him because, Emperor as he was, he was not ashamed to do the public penance from which many of low degree shrink, and because he deplored his sin every day he lived. I loved him because, when he was about to breathe

<sup>1</sup> *Hæreditatem fidei nobis reliquerunt Abraham, Isaac et Jacob—fidelis Abraham qui non ex operibus sed ex fide justificatus est, fidelis Isaac qui per fidem non expavit gladium ferituri parentis; Jacob qui paternæ fidei vestigium intentus, dum iter agit, videt angelorum exercitum,—“De obitu Theodosii oratio.” 9.*

his last, and sent for me, I found him more anxious at that supreme moment about the condition of the Church, than about his own danger. I loved him, I say again, I mourn for him from my heart's depths, and I hope of the goodness of God that He will listen to my prayer on the wings of which I try to follow into His presence, this pious soul."

These sincere expressions of grief, these uncompromising allusions to the dead man's errors, must have struck the young Emperor as contrasting strangely with the unreal, stilted language of the panegyrics which rhetoricians and Pagan poets were heaping on him as a pleasing homage to his father's memory.

Ambrose cared less to please him than to lay before him the obligations of his inherited task, the duties of an Emperor who adopts the Christian standard in his policy. He does this particularly at the close of his sermon, and in language that requires a few explanatory words.

He represents Theodosius as coming to take his place beside Constantine, in the celestial abode. Why beside Constantine, it might have been asked, the Emperor whose reputation is obscured by regrettable errors and dark memories? Could not some worthier companion be chosen for Theodosius? But Ambrose had a meaning in his parable. Constantine inaugurated the Empire that Theodosius crowned. Constantine first made the Christian religion the basis of Imperial authority; on that basis alone would it be durable. Such was the lesson Ambrose wanted to convey, and hence his

bold metaphor. He tells the whole story of the Finding of the Cross by St Helena, the mother of Constantine, and of her having taken from it one of the nails with which the sacred body had been fastened, and of her having caused this nail to be set in the Imperial diadem.

"O wise Helena," he says, "you have set the cross upon the head of sovereigns that it may be adored in the homage paid to them. O sacred nail, thou art become the very nail that holds together the Empire the world obeys. Worthy ornament for the head of Princes, who once persecuted the faith they now proclaim. Let them keep this gift of Christ, that of them, as of Himself, it may one day be said, Thou hast set on His head a crown of precious stones."<sup>1</sup>

This peroration a modern writer has reproduced, in language falling very far short of the glowing faith and patriotism of the original, and has been unable to refrain from the following remark upon it. "Had Ambrose at that moment cast a glance over his audience, he might have chanced to see among the crowd a certain youthful Goth who had taken part in the victory of Theodosius and was then on the point of returning with his squadron of cavalry to Germany. Alaric was the young man's name, and his countrymen knew him as the Bal, or

<sup>1</sup> Bonus itaque clavus romani imperii qui totum regit orbem ac vestit principum frontem, ut siut prædicatores qui persecutores esse consueverunt. . . Habeant hoc etiam principes Christi liberabile concessum ut ad imitationem Domini dicatur de Imperatore Romano : Posuisti in capite ejus coronam de lapide pretioso.—De. Ob. Theod. 48.

the Bold. The future destroyer of Rome was perhaps present, pensive and unknown, while the Empire laid to rest her last hero, and a Roman voice called on the tomb for the promises of the future. Less than twenty years shall pass, and the unknown youth will march, a conqueror across the field of wars amid ruins, whilst the heir to all the promises of Ambrose will have fled in shame and terror to the shores of the Adriatic."<sup>1</sup>

Ambrose survived Theodosius only two years, but long enough to see that the Empire was hurrying to the fall that the strong hand of Theodosius, and the honest endeavours of Valentinian, for a time had averted. Honorius was only twelve years old when he became the nominal sovereign; but all substantial authority was vested in the hands of his tutor. Stilicho was an officer of high rank, whom Theodosius had sufficiently respected to allow him to marry into the Imperial family. His name figures honourably in history, and he seems to have deserved his reputation, at any rate, as a soldier. He must, at least, have professed the Christian faith, otherwise Theodosius would not have called him to fulfil the important trust he confided to him, and he must also have believed that he would treat Ambrose with all the respect due to him.

But he was rough, his manners betrayed the Goth origin attributed to him, and even Zosimus, a writer far from unfavourable to him, allows that, although he was irreproachably honest in all the

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire de l'Eglise et de l'Empire au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle." vol. VI. p. 42.

military appointments he held, the exercise of more extensive power soon corrupted him, and he unscrupulously abused his position to increase his private fortune. His example was followed, and soon, from the top of the ladder of official life to the bottom, every one thought only of his own advantage—everything, everyone was bought and sold. This produced inevitable misery, especially among the poorer classes, already greatly impoverished by successive revolutions and disturbances, and the effect this state of things produced on Ambrose may be readily imagined. Nothing, his biographer who lived with him, tells us, gave him so much pain as to be obliged, as he constantly was in the course of business, to apply to any of these venal officials, with whom everything had a market value. In his own writings, attributed to this period, he says much the same thing. He draws a dark picture of social corruption, of selfishness, greed for riches, and insensibility to the miseries of the poor.

Powerless to stem the tide, baffled in his efforts to do good, an irresistible sadness invaded his strong spirit and he was often heard to express his old longing to be free from the miseries of this present world. "Others," he used to say, "may be wanted here to do good to their brethren; but, as for me, I am of use to no one, and I shall there have the joy of committing no more sin." One of his very latest treatises is on the "Benefit of Death" (*De Bono mortis*). "O, my Father," he prays, "open Thine arms to receive the poor servant who cries to Thee. Open

wide Thy bosom to receive me, and with me all those who have believed in the Lord. They are many, for the Faith has 'exceedingly grown' but iniquity still abounds on the earth and the charity of many has grown cold.<sup>1</sup> We will join those who rest in the bosom of God, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all who, invited to the marriage-feast, did not refuse to attend. Let us go to the place where a thief was not denied admittance, the Heavenly Kingdom, where are neither cloud nor thunder, neither storm nor darkness, neither day nor night, nor any change of season. Where neither the sun nor the moon are needed to shine, for the Glory of the Lord enlightens it, Who is the Light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. O Lord it is our desire to be with Thee; draw us to Thyself."

These are almost exactly the same words as those he uses in his commentary on the 43rd Psalm of David. He was too feeble to write this commentary himself, and, feeling his weakness increasing, he dictated it to the young secretary who was afterwards his biographer. When he came to the verse, "Thou hast humbled us in the place of affliction, and the shadow of death has overcome us," he said: "It is hard indeed to wait so long for the day that is to swallow up the shadow of death! How hard it is to drag about so long this body already overcome by the shadow of death. Rise Lord! Why sleepest Thou? How long wilt Thou cast me off?"

<sup>1</sup> *Quamvis fides creverit, abundat iniquitas, refrigerat caritas.*—  
 "De Bono mortis," p. 53.

"At that moment," says his secretary Paulinus, "I saw a globe of flame playing on his forehead, then it floated on his lips, after which his face became as white as snow.<sup>1</sup> I was struck with such awe that my fingers stiffened, and I could not go on writing, and from that time he dictated no more." The commentary upon the 43rd Psalm exists, and ends at the 25th verse, leaving two verses upon which nothing is said.

A few days later he took to his bed, and when it became known in Milan that he was very ill the whole city was troubled. Each felt that his death would be a personal loss. "The day that this great man dies," said Stilicho, "will be the destruction of Italy," and, sending for the most notable personages and magistrates of the city, especially those he knew Ambrose had most regard for, he persuaded them to go to him and ask him to pray to God to grant him longer life. But Ambrose answered: "I have not so lived among you, that I should be ashamed to live longer; nor am I afraid to die for we have a good Master." Good Friday came, and for five hours he lay with his arms extended in the form of a cross, changing his attitude only for a moment to receive

<sup>1</sup> Ne excipiente et vidente subito in modum scuti brevis ignis caput qui cooperuit atque paulatim per os ipsius tanquam domum habitator ingressus est: post quod facta est facies ejus sicut nix. . . . Quod cum fieret stupore percussus obrigui, nec potui scribere quæ ab eo dicebantur. Nam scribendi vel dictandi eo die finem fecit, si quidem ipsum psalmum explere non potuit.—"Vita S. Ambrosi a Paulino scripta," p. 429. This account of the life of Ambrose was written by his secretary Paulinus at the request of St Augustine.



the communion. That evening he died. His body was carried to the Basilica, where it lay all through the night before Easter Day.

Had Ambrose, standing on the threshold of celestial joys, no lingering regret for the country he had so loved and prayed for, exposed to so many perils, for the great Roman Empire which he had fondly hoped to perpetuate by consecrating it to the Faith? Had he any presentiment of the important part the Christian Episcopate would fill when the world, that had seemed tottering to its fall, rose again to renewed vitality, a part in which he had led the way? But questions such as these are idle. God gives His servants no foreknowledge of his plans. He hears their prayers to give them what they have not asked for, to crown their efforts with rewards they have not sought.

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